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MYSTERY BOOK

MAGAZINE

WINTER

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The MASKED ANGEL

A Saint Novel

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE OTHER MAN'S SHOES

A Long Novelet

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196 PAGES OF NEW DETECTIVE FICTION

MYSTERY BOOK

WINTER 1948

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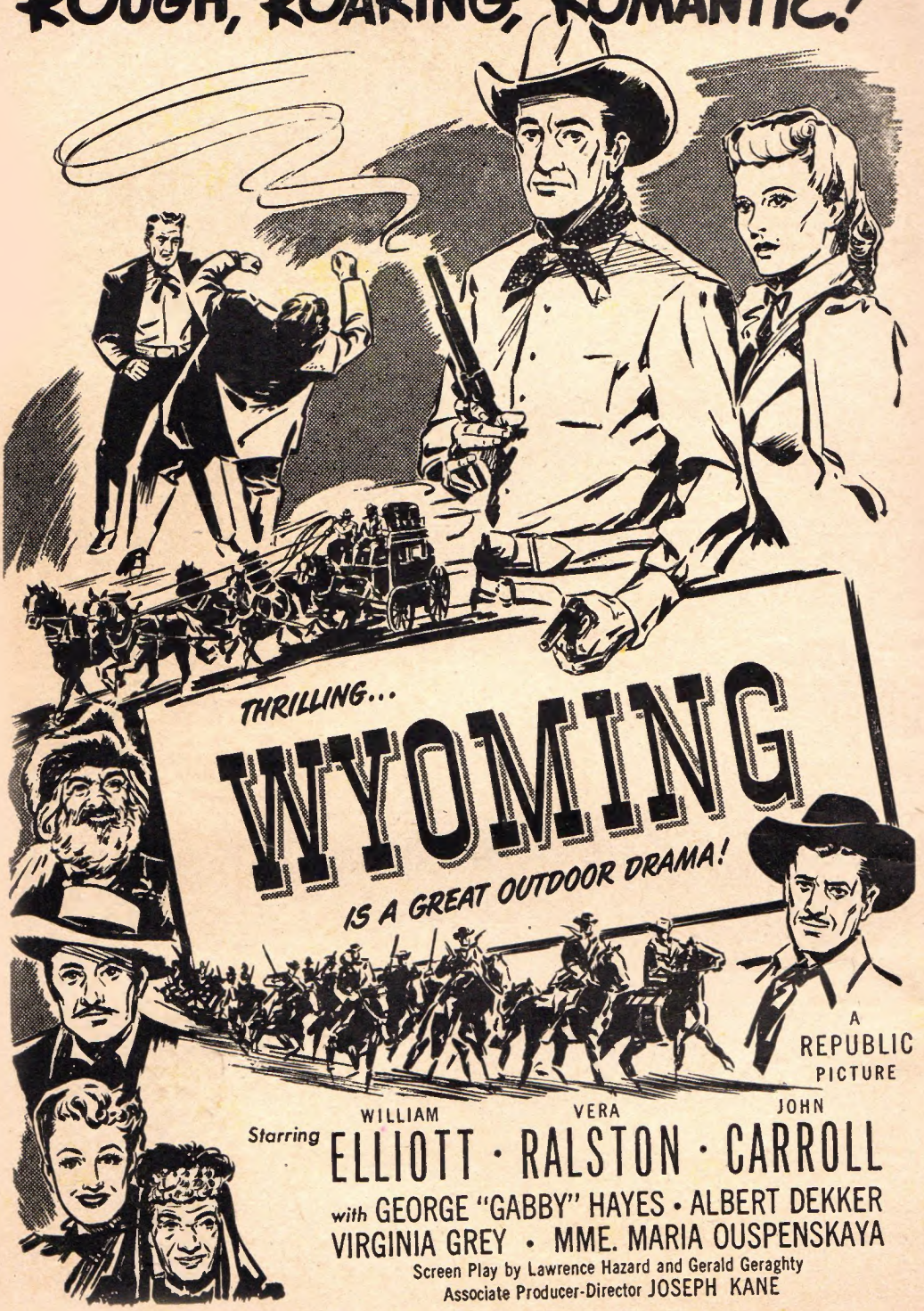

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Mystery Book Magazine

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Vol. 6, No. 2 WINTER, 1948 Price 25c

A Complete Novel

THE MASKED ANGEL . . . . . LESLIE CHARTERIS 13

When Torpedo Smith goes down for the final count the timekeeper's bell tolls murder—and the Saint mixes with sudden death in the prize ring!

Three Complete Novelets

THE OTHER MAN'S SHOES . . . . . KELLEY ROOS 86

Ray Murray hides out in a small town to write a play—and finds that he has adopted the identity of a man who is marked for grisly murder!

MY BEST FRIEND IS DEATH . WILBUR S. PEACOCK 132

The police were on one side, the real killer was on the other, and Bob Cummings was right in the middle in this tense and baffling crime case!

RACE FOR THE MORGUE . . WYATT BLASSINGAME 160

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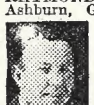

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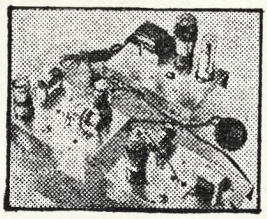

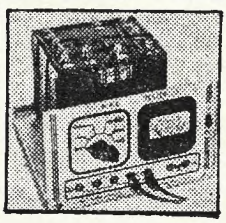

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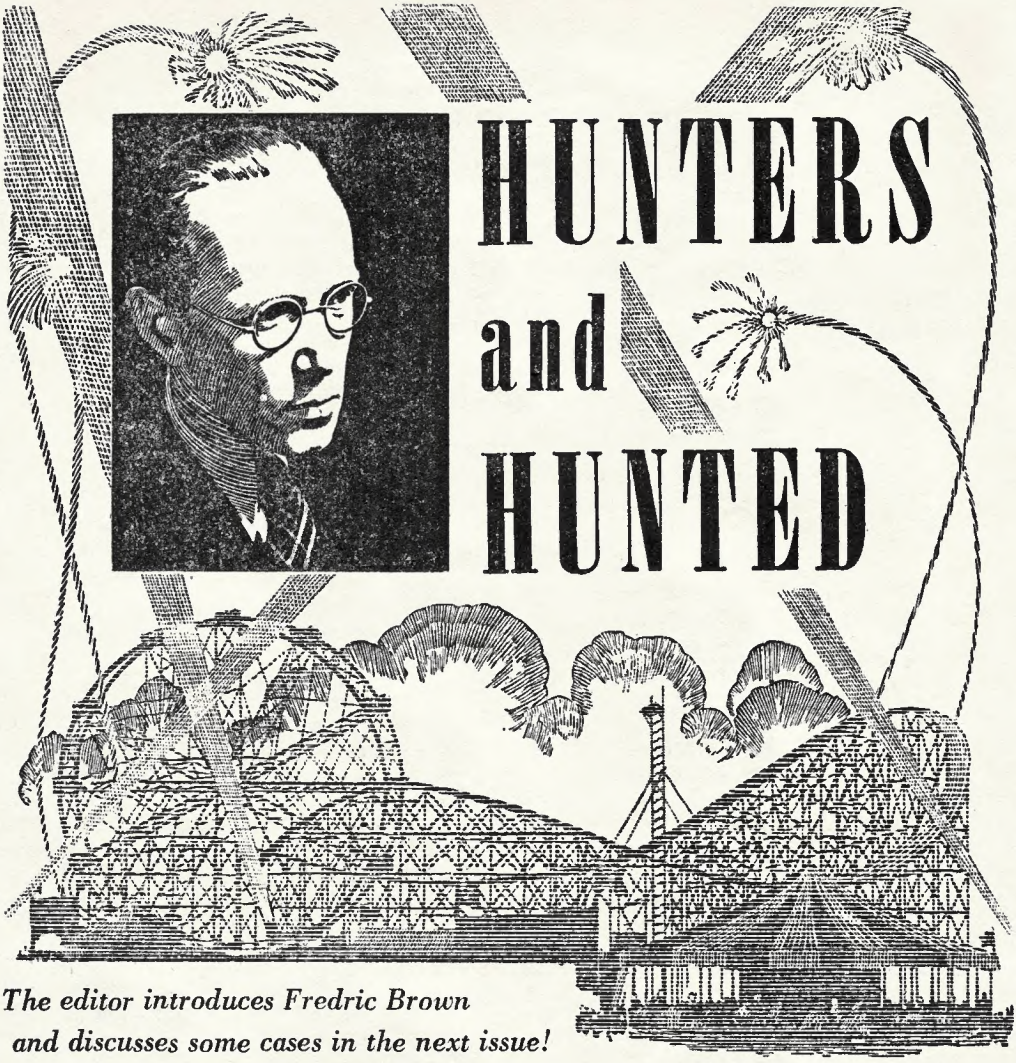

HUNTERS and HUNTED

The editor introduces Fredric Brown and discusses some cases in the next issue!

THERE is often more in a name than appears on the surface. Take the name of Hunter, for instance. It's a plain, everyday name like Smith or Jones. A fellow with the name of Hunter could ordinarily expect to lead a plain, middle-of-the-road existence with no unusual excitement, no fame, no notoriety.

That's just how young Ed Hunter always felt about his name. There had never been any unusual events in his life. His family got along as well as could be expected. They lived in Chicago's Loop district with a lot of other families in similar circumstances. Not poor, exactly. But certainly not rich.

Then one night in a deserted Chicago alley somebody slipped up behind Ed's father and bashed his head in. From that moment young Ed was made powerfully aware of the more sinister implications in the name Hunter. From that moment Ed and his Uncle Ambrose, a carney worker, became hunters—man-hunters—in the strict sense of the word.

Their desperate unceasing chase after "the hunted" (the killer of Ed's father) formed the basis of Fredric Brown's

(Continued on page 8)

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HUNTERS AND HUNTED

(Continued from page 6)

first book-length murder mystery, "Dead Man's Indemnity" which we had the pleasure of publishing in MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE some months ago and which E. P. Dutton & Company recently issued as a $2.50 book under the title "The Fabulous Clipjoint."

The Name Is Brown

And now once again Ed Hunter and his Uncle Am find themselves cast in the role of hunters—manhunters—when a murderer strikes down a helpless midget in the dead of night at a carnival in Fredric Brown's second complete book-length novel, "The Dead Ringer" which highlights the forthcoming issue of MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE along with a gripping novelet, "Payoff in Violence," by Hugh Pentecost.

Leaving the Hunters for just a moment, let us turn to author Fredric Brown who also answers to a common, ordinary name. Offhand, you might say there is nothing to the name. Yet, here is a man who has written more than three hundred mystery and detective stories of unusual distinction. "The Dead Ringer" is his second novel and even better than his first, and a third novel is on the way.

Readers can take a tip from us that, although his name is Brown—a name claimed by thousands of his fellow Americans—this particular Brown is going to be a name to reckon with in the field of mystery fiction during the next few years.

Brown was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1906, which makes him just forty on the head. He is patiently waiting to see if life begins now. Well, if we're any kind of a prophet it is due to begin this year of 1947.

After going through Cincinnati public and high schools, Brown spent a year at Hanover College in Hanover, Indiana. Then he returned to Cincinnati to start work as a stenographer. In 1929, the

(Continued on page 10)

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HUNTERS AND HUNTED

(Continued from page 8)

year of the great financial bust, he got married and moved to Milwaukee.

Man of Many Trades

He has remained in Milwaukee ever since, except for brief sojourns in Chicago, Albuquerque, Los Angeles, El Paso and Indianapolis. Besides being a stenographer he has done a stint at the following jobs: insurance salesman, bookkeeper, stock clerk, dishwasher and busboy. He finally landed in the printing trade as a proofreader and has been toiling away at it for ten years with occasional lapses to do free lance writing.

Many of our readers who saw the RKO screen hit "Crack-Up," starring George O'Brien, Claire Trevor and Herbert Marshall, will be interested to learn that the picture was based on one of Fredric Brown's magazine stories.

And that's not all. "A Voice Behind Him" which ran in the January issue of MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE and which, to our way of thinking, is one of the greatest mystery stories ever written, has just been selected by E. P. Dutton & Company for inclusion in an anthology soon to appear, "Best Detective Stories of the Year." Take it from us, the editors of the Dutton anthology could not have chosen a better story.

Author Brown has two sons, 14 and 16, both in high school. The younger boy is crazy about photography and the other, just like Ed Hunter in his father's novels, likes music, with particular emphasis on playing the clarinet and sax.

Brown himself likes poker and chess and "lubricated" conversation. He, too, is fond of music. He finds particular pleasure in the extremes of good symphonic music and real down-to-earth jazz.

Writing is a hobby—something that he just can't stay away from when the bug is biting him. But, unlike those

(Continued on page 185)

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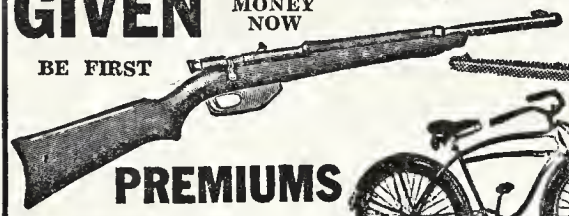

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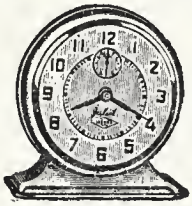

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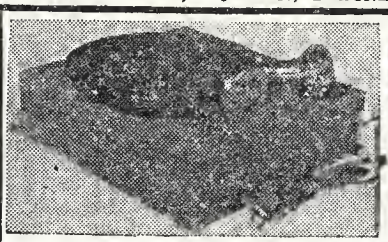

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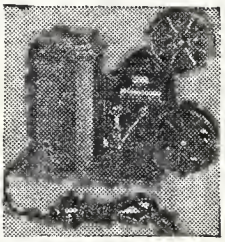

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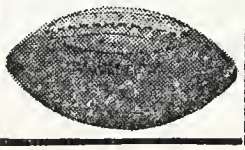

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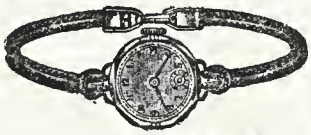

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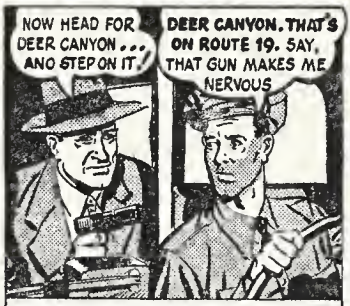


LEAVING THE OPEN RADIO MIKE ON HIS LAP, JOE REPEATS THE UNSUSPECTING THUG'S INSTRUCTIONS . . .

. . . TO HIS GARAGE, WHERE THE SUPERINTENDENT RELAYS THEM TO THE POLICE

THE MASKED ANGEL

Simon Templar—Twentieth Century Buccaneer—Mixes with Sudden Death in the Prize Ring

A New Saint Novel by **LESLIE CHARTERIS**

AT THIS moment Simon Templar was not quite enjoying the thrill of a lifetime.

Relaxed as much as the immediate carpentry would permit in his ringside seat between Hoppy Uniatz and Patricia Holm, he blended the smoke of his own cigarette with the cigar-and-sweat

aroma of the Manhattan Arena, and contemplated the dying moments of the semi-final bout with his sapphire eyes musing under lazily drooping lids.

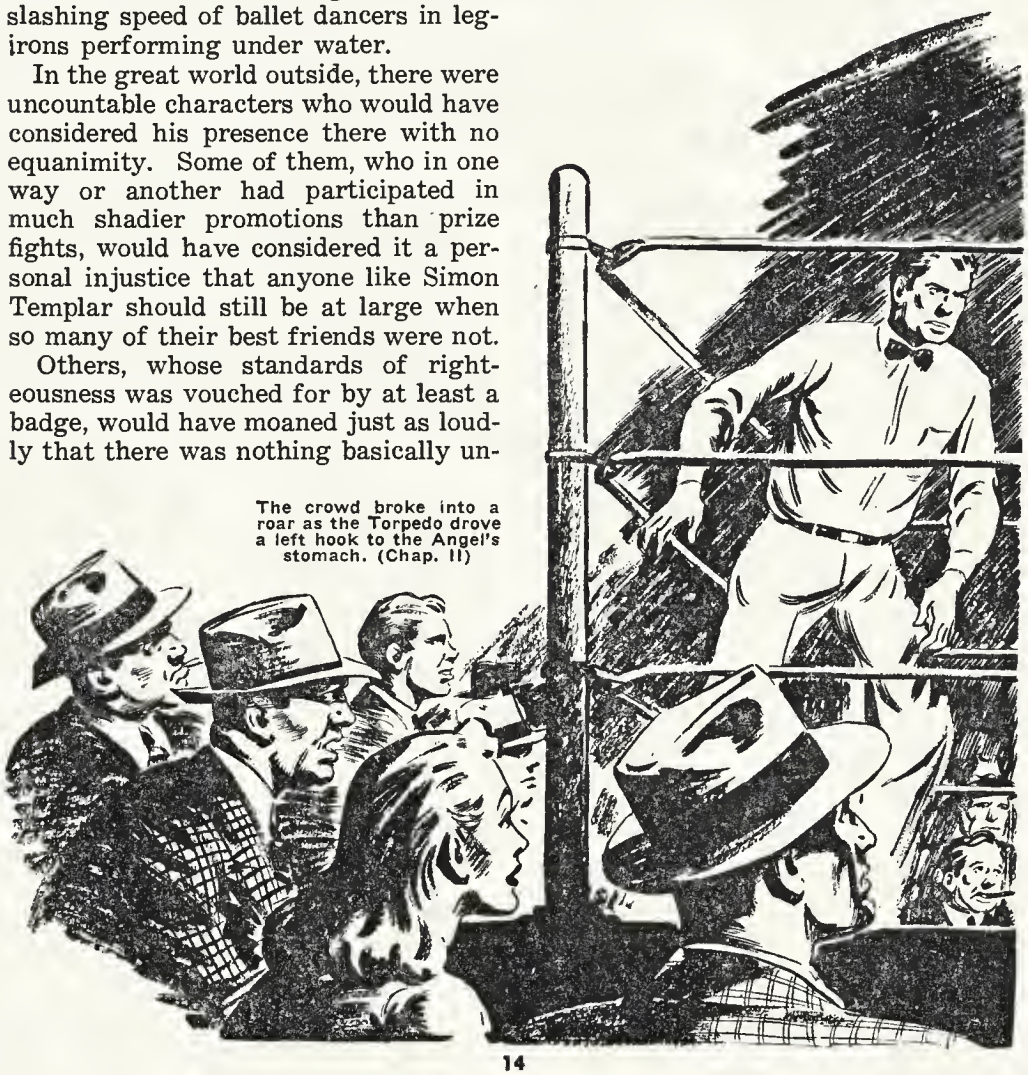
Never addicted to obtaining his thrills vicariously, the man who was better known to the world as "the Saint" would have found small cause for excitement if he had been accustomed to following such sedentary pursuits. Being there anyhow, he slouched in easy grace, the clean-cut lines of his face etched in a bronze mask of sardonic detachment as he watched the two gladiators move about the ring with all the slashing speed of ballet dancers in leg-irons performing under water.

In the great world outside, there were uncountable characters who would have considered his presence there with no equanimity. Some of them, who in one way or another had participated in much shadier promotions than prize fights, would have considered it a personal injustice that anyone like Simon Templar should still be at large when so many of their best friends were not.

Others, whose standards of righteousness was vouched for by at least a badge, would have moaned just as loudly that there was nothing basically unhappy about a policeman's lot except what the Saint might plant in it.

If Inspector Fernack, for instance, had seen him there, that bull-dogged minion of the law would have pondered darkly. He would have sensed from long experience in previous encounters with this amazing modern buccaneer that the Saint could have no orthodox interest in such a dreary offering of Promoter Mike Grady's salon of swat.

Of course, the main bout between Torpedo Smith and the celebrated Masked Angel would probably be more



The crowd broke into a roar as the Torpedo drove a left hook to the Angel's stomach. (Chap. II)

interesting, but Simon Templar wasn't there just for the entertainment. That was something John Henry Fernack would never have believed.

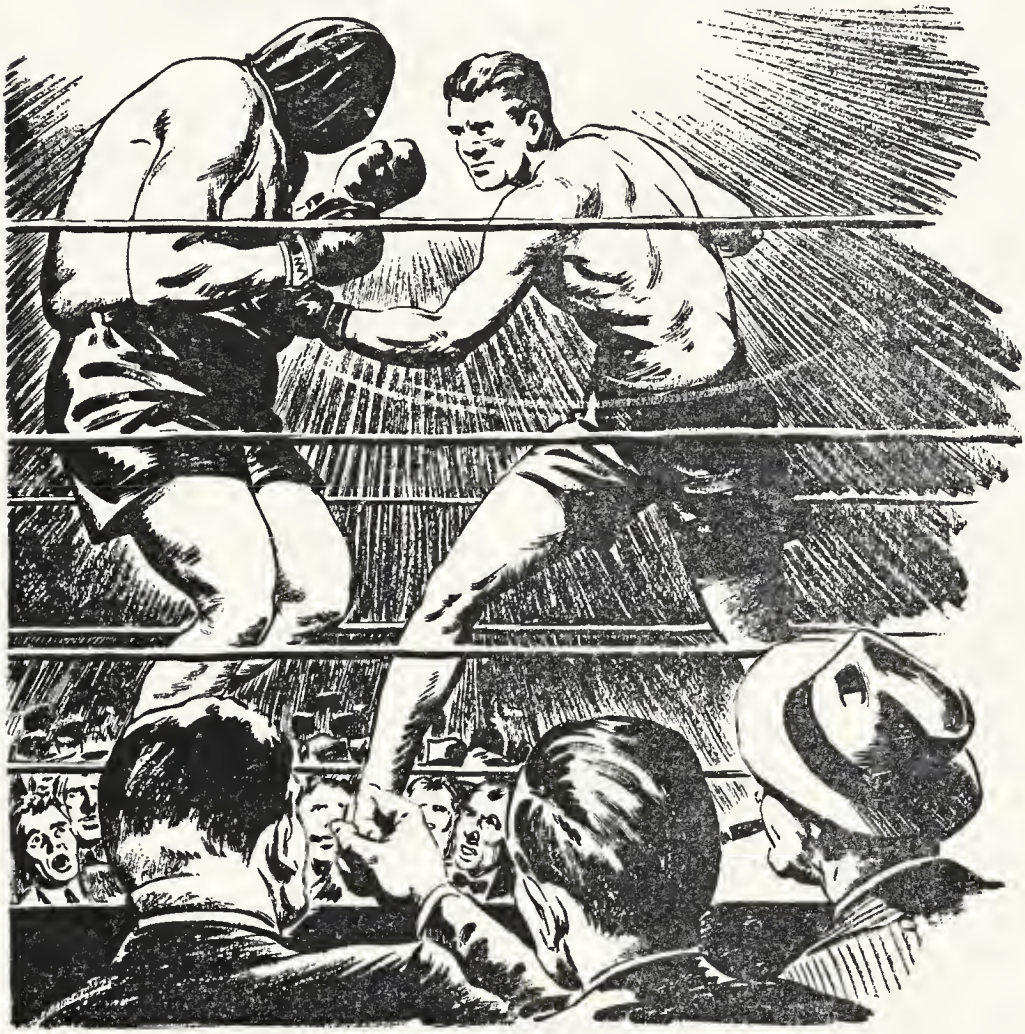
And on this occasion he would have been right.

Jeers swept in derisive breakers over the two Ferdinands in the ring without in the least disturbing the equilibrium of their mitt minuet. The massed feet of the cash customers began to stamp in metronomic disapproval and Simon's chair jumped as the box-car brogans on his left added their pile-driving weight to the crashing cantata. Their owner's klaxon voice lifted in a brassy ululation with overtones reminiscent of the bellow of a poisoned water buffalo.

This, the Saint recognized, was merely Hoppy Uniatz's rendition of a disgusted groan.

"Boss," Hoppy heaved, "dis is moider!" The narrow strip of wrinkles that passed for Hoppy's forehead were deep with scorn. "I oughta go up dere and t'row 'em bot' outta de ring."

Hoppy's impulses were beautiful in their straightforward simplicity and



homicidal honesty. The small globule of protoplasm that lurked within his rockbound skull, serving the nominal function of a brain, piloted his anthropoidal body exclusively along paths of primitive action, unencumbered by any subtleties of thought or teleological considerations.

The torture of cerebration he left entirely to the man to whose lucky star he'd hitched his wagon. For, to Hoppy, the Saint was not of this ordinary world. He was a Merlin who brought strange wonders to pass with godlike nonchalance, whose staggering schemes were engineered with supernatural ease to inevitable success.

The Saint smiled at him tenderly.

"Relax, chum. This isn't the fight we came to see anyway."

The dream with the spun-gold hair on Simon's right smiled.

"Never," admonished Patricia Holm, "look gift horses in the mouth."

"To corn a phrase," the Saint observed dryly.

"Huh?" Hoppy stared at the Saint's lady in open-mouthed p e r p l e x i t y. "Horses?" His face, which bore a strong family resemblance to those seen on totem poles designed to frighten away evil spirits, was a study in loose-lipped wonder. "What horses?"

"After all," Pat said, "we're here as guests and—"

THE clanking of the bell terminated the fight and the need for further explanation. The sound pulled the trigger on a thunderclap of boos as the unfatigued gladiators were waved to their respective corners to await the decision. It came swiftly—a well-booed draw.

"What a clambake," Hoppy muttered.

"No hits, no runs, no fight," Simon murmured sardonically.

"They had a lot of respect for each other," Pat observed innocently.

"Respect!" Hoppy exploded. "Dem bums was doggin' it. I could beat bot' deir brains out togedder wit' bot' hands tied behind me." He simmered with righteous outrage. "I only hope de Masked Angel don't knock out Torpedo Smith *too* quick. We oughta let him stay for at least a coupla rounds so maybe we'll see *some* fightin'."

"If there's any fighting to be seen," Simon said absently, "at least we're in a good position to see it."

The chiseled leanness of his cheekbone and jaw were picked out vividly as he lighted a cigarette. Pat, glancing at the flame momentarily reflected in those mocking blue eyes, felt a familiar surge of yearning and pride.

For he was a very reincarnation of those privateers who once knew the Spanish Main, a modern buccaneer consecrated to the gods of gay and perilous adventure, a cavalier as variable as a chameleon, who would always be at once the surest and most elusive thing in her life.

"Yeah," Hoppy agreed grudgingly. "Dey ain't nut'n wrong wit' de seats. Ya must have some drag wit' de promoter, boss."

"I've never even met him."

Simon wasn't listening really. His eyes were angled to his left, gazing through a meditative plume of smoke to where Steve Nelson was rising about a dozen seats away and climbing into the ring to be introduced as the champion who would defend his title against the winner of tonight's bout.

However, it wasn't Nelson whom Simon was watching. It was the girl in the seat beside Nelson—a girl with curly red hair, big green eyes, and a nose whose snub pertness was an infinitely lovelier reproduction of her Irish sire's well-publicized proboscis.

"I suppose he just thought this would be a nice way to introduce himself," Patricia mocked. "The little ringside tickets, that's all. Sent by special messenger, no less. Compliments of Mike Grady and the Manhattan Arena!"

The girl with the red hair had turned and, for a brief instant, met Simon's gaze. He spoke without taking his eyes off her.

"Pat darling, you're taking too much for granted. It wasn't Mike who sent them."

"No?"

"No. It was his daughter, Connie. Third from the aisle in the front row."

She followed his gaze.

There was no hint of coquetry in the eyes of the red-haired girl. There was something in them quite different—a swift glow of gratitude tempered by an anxiety that shadowed her clear elfin beauty. Then she turned away.

Pat smiled with feline sweetness.

"I see. How nice of her to think you might need some excitement!"

Hoppy's porcine eyes blinked. "Boss, ain't she de Champ's girl-friend?"

"So I've heard." Simon smiled and blew a large smoke ring that rose lethargically over the seat in front of him and settled about the bald pate of its occupant like a pale blue halo.

A scattered burst of cheering greeted Torpedo Smith's entrance into the ring.

"Shouldn't you be more careful about picking your leading ladies?" Pat inquired with saccharin concern.

"I have to face the hazards of my profession," Simon explained, with a glint of mockery in his blue eyes. "There may be some excitement at that —although I don't mean what *you're* thinking, darling."

The memory of Connie's visit, her confused plea for him to see the fight, lingered in his mind like the haunting refrain of strange music, a siren measure awakening an old familiar chill, prescient and instinctive, warning of danger that was no less perilous because it was as yet unknown.

The crowd broke into a roar.

"It's de Angel!" Hoppy proclaimed. "He's climbin' in de ring!"

CHAPTER II

THE current sensation of the leather-pushing profession was indeed mounting the punch podium. As he squeezed his hogshead torso between the ropes the Saint saw that the mask was really nothing more than a black beanbag that fitted over his small potato head with apertures for eyes, nose and mouth and fastened by a draw-string between chin and shoulder at the place where a normal person's neck would ordinarily be, but which, in the Angel, was no more than an imaginary line of demarcation.

He shambled to his corner like a hairless gorilla and clasped his bandaged hands over his head in a salute to the enraptured mob.

Patricia shuddered.

"Simon, is it human?"

The Saint grinned.

"He'll never win any contests for the body beautiful, but of course we haven't seen his face yet. He may be quite handsome."

"Dere ain't *nobody* seen his face," Hoppy confided. "Dese wrestlers what pull dis gag wit' de mask on de face, dey don't care who knows who dey really are. But Doc Spangler, he don't let nobody see who his boy is. Maybe it's for luck. De Masked Angel ain't lost a fight yet!"

"Doc Spangler?"

Hoppy's head bobbed affirmatively. He pointed to a well-dressed, portly gentleman who looked more like a bank president out for an evening's entertainment than a fighter's manager. At the moment, Spangler was standing in smiling conversation with one of the Angel's seconds.

"Dat's de Doc," Hoppy went on. "He's de guy who discovers de Angel from some place. Dat Doc is sure a smart cookie, boss."

The Saint smiled agreeably.

"You can say that again."

The salient features of Doc Spangler's history passed through Simon Templar's mind in swift procession—a record which, among many others, was filled with inexorable clarity in the infinite index of a memory whose indelibility had time and again proven one of the more useful tools of his profession.

"In fifteen fights," Hoppy expounded, "he brings de Angel from nowhere to a fight wit' de Champ t'ree weeks from now!"

Pat lifted an eyebrow.

"Even if Torpedo Smith beats him?"

"Aaah!" Hoppy chortled derisively. "Dat bum ain't got a chanst! De Angel'll moider him! You wait and see."

The Champ, having shaken hands with the two contenders, climbed out of the ring and resumed his seat beside Connie Grady. Then the fighters rose from their corners as the referee waved them to the center of the ring for instructions.

Pat, wide-eyed, shook her head unbelievingly.

"Simon, that with the mask—he—he's fantastic! Those arms—his gloves are touching his knees!"

"A fascinating example of evolution in reverse," Simon remarked.

The Masked Angel was indeed a remarkable specimen. With his arms dangling alongside his enormous hairless body he was the very antithesis of the classic conception of an athlete, his sagging breasts and vast pink belly undulating in billows of fat.

Though his hips narrowed, wasp-like, to the negligible proportions of a bull gorilla's, his flabby thighs ballooned out like a pair of mammoth loose-skinned sausages, tapering to a pair of stubby tree-trunk legs.

"A freak," Pate decided. "He wears the ridiculous mask because he's a pinhead."

"But even he can do somebody some good. You've got to admit that he makes Hoppy look like a creature of svelte and sprightly beauty."

"In dis racket, boss," Hoppy mulled with a heavy concentration of wisdom, "you don't have to be good lookin'." Suddenly he sat up straight and strained forward. "Well, for cryin' out loud!"

"What's the matter?" The Saint followed his gaze to the ring.

Hoppy waved a finger in the general direction of the two contestants and their handlers now standing in the middle of the ring listening to the referee.

"Lookit, boss! Standin' behind Torpedo Smith—his handler! It's me old chum, Whitey Mullins!"

The fighters and their seconds were turning back to their respective corners. Whitey Mullins, a slender rubbery-faced little man with thin flaxen hair, wearing a turtle-necked sweater and sneakers, convoyed Smith to his corner and climbed out of the ring, taking the stool with him. The Saint recognized him as one of the professional seconds connected with the Manhattan Arena.

"One of the Torpedo's propellers," I take it?"

Hoppy nodded.

"He works a lot wit' me when I am in the box-fight racket, boss." Fond memories of yesteryear's mayhem lit his gorgon countenance. "Cyclone Uniatz, dey called me."

"That, no doubt, explains why you never get up before the stroke of ten," Simon observed.

"Huh?"

PAT giggled as the bell clanked for the first round.

The Angel shuffled forward slowly, his arms held high, peering cautiously between his gloves at the oncoming Torpedo Smith. Smith, who had crashed into the top ranks of pugilism via a string of varied victories far longer than the unbroken string of knockouts boasted by the Masked Angel, moved warily about his opponent, jabbing tentative lefts at the unmoving barrier of arms that the Angel held before him.

The Angel turned slowly as Smith moved about him, the fantastic black cupola of his masked head sunk protectingly between beefy pink shoulders, the little eye slits peering watchfully. He kept turning, keeping Smith before him, without attempting a blow. The Torpedo moved about more deliberately, with a certain puzzlement, as though he couldn't understand the Angel's unwillingness to retaliate.

There was a stillness in the crowd, a sense of waiting as for the explosion of a bomb whose fuse was burning before their very eyes.

Pat spoke at last.

"But Simon, they're just looking at each other."

The Saint's fist buried itself in Spangler's paunch, collapsing him like a deflated blimp. (Chap. III)

The Saint selected another cigarette and tapped it on his thumb.

"You can't blame them. It'll probably take a round for them just to get over the sight of each other."

Hoppy lifted a voice that rang with the dulcet music of a foghorn with laryngitis.

"Come on, you Angel! Massecrate de bum!"

But the Angel, with supreme indifference to encouragement, merely kept shuffling around to meet the probing jabs of Torpedo Smith.

The crowd broke into a roar as the Torpedo suddenly drove a left hook to the Angel's stomach, doubling him up. Then, casting caution to the winds, he followed with a swift onslaught of lefts and rights. The Angel, arms, gloves, and elbows shielding his exposed surfaces, merely backed into a corner and crouched there until the bell punctuated the round.

Pat shook her head bewilderedly.

"Simon, I don't understand. This Masked Angel doesn't look as if he can fight at all. All he did was make like a turtle while that other man tried to find some place to hit him."

"Oh, you just wait," Hoppy growled reassuringly. "Dis fight ain't over yet. De smart money is bettin' t'ree to one de Angel kayoes Smith insida six rounds. He wins *all* his fights by kayoes."

The Saint was watching the two gladiators being given the customary libations of water and between-round advice by their handlers.

He smiled thoughtfully.

"The Masked Angel has a very clever manager."

The bell for the second round brought Torpedo Smith out with a rush. Gaining confidence with every blow, he drove the quivering hulk of the Angel back on his heels, bringing the crowd to its feet in a steady roar of excitement.

"Hoppy," the Saint spoke into Hoppy's ear, "has the Angel ever been cut under that black stocking he wears over his head?"

"Huh? Naw, boss! His fights never last long enough for him to get hoit." Hoppy's eyes squinted anxiously. "Chees! Why don't he do sump'n? Torpedo Smith is givin' him de woiks!"

Pat was bouncing in her seat, the soft curve of her lips parted with excitement as she watched.

"I thought the Angel was so wonderful!" she gibed. "Come on, Torpedo!"

"Dey're bot' on de ropes!" Hoppy exclaimed hoarsely.

The Saint's hawk-sharp eyes suddenly narrowed. No, it was Torpedo Smith who was on the ropes now. With the Angel in control! Something had happened—something he hadn't seen. He gripped Hoppy's arm.

"Something's wrong with Smith."

Something was very definitely wrong with Torpedo Smith. He stood shaking his head desperately as if to clear it, holding onto the top rope with one hand and with the other trying to push away the black-masked monster who was now opening up with the relentless power of a pile-driver.

"De Angel musta hit him!" Hoppy yelled. "I told ya, didn't I? I told ya!" His foghorn bellow rose over the mob's fierce blood cry. *"Smith's down!"*

Torpedo Smith, obviously helpless, had slumped beneath the repeated impact of the Angel's deliberate blows and now lay where he had fallen, face down, as the referee tolled him out.

The sea of humanity began ebbing like a tide toward the exits, the vast drown of their voices and shuffling feet covered by the recessional of a pipe-organ striking up "Anchors Away" from somewhere in the bowels of the colosseum.

"Well, ya see, boss?" Hoppy jubilated as they drifted into the aisle. "It's just like I told ya. De Angel's dynamite!"

Pat shook her golden head compassionately.

"That poor fellow—the way that horrible creature hit him when he was helpless! Why didn't the referee stop it?"

SHE turned, suddenly aware that Simon was no longer behind her. She looked about bewilderedly. "Simon!"

"Dere he is!" Hoppy waved a ham-like hand toward the end of the row they had just left. "Boss!"

The Saint was standing near the ring watching the efforts of Whitey Mullins and his assistants to revive Torpedo Smith.

Hoppy breasted the current with the irresistible surge of a battleship, and returned to Simon's side with Pat in his wake.

"What is it, Simon?" Pat asked.

The Saint glanced at her and back at the ring. He took a final pull at his cigarette, then tossed it away.

"They've just called the Boxing Commission doctor into Smith's corner," he said.

Pat stared at the ring.

"Is he still unconscious?"

"Aw, dat's nuttin'." Hoppy dismissed Smith's narcosis with a scornful lift of his anthropogenous jaw. "I slug a guy oncet who is out for twelve hours, an' when dey—"

"Wait a minute," the Saint interrupted, and moved toward Smith's corner as Whitey Mullins leaped from the ring to the floor.

"Whitey!" Hoppy bellowed joyfully. "Whassamatter, chum? Can't ya wake up dat sleepin' beauty?"

Whitey glanced at him with no recognition, his wide flexible mouth contorted curiously.

Hoppy blinked.

"Whitey! Whassamatter?"

Pat glanced at the ring with quick

concern. "Is Smith hurt badly?"

The tow-headed little man with the lean, limber face stared at her a moment with twisting lips. When he spoke, his high-pitched Brooklyn accent was muted with tragedy.

"He's dead," he said, and turned away.

The spectral cymbal of adventure clashed an eerie tocsin within the Saint, louder now than when first he heard the faint far notes in Connie Grady's flustered appeal for him to search the sinister riddle of the Angel's victories, and save her fiancé from unknown peril.

He spoke softly into Pat's ear.

"Darling, I just remembered. Hoppy and I have some vitally urgent business to attend to immediately. Do you mind going home alone?"

Patricia Holm looked up sharply, the startled pique on her lovely face giving way swiftly to disquieted resignation. She knew him too well.

"What is it, Simon? What are you up to?"

"I'll explain later. I'm already late. Be a good girl." He kissed her lightly. "I'll make it up to you," he said, and left her gazing after him as he sauntered down the long concrete ramp leading to the fighters' dressing rooms with Hoppy shambling in his wake like a happy bear.

CHAPTER III

THE door of the Number One dressing room beneath the floor of the Manhattan Arena rattled and shook as the sports writers milled about the corridor outside and protested their exclusion. Who, one of them shouted, did the big ham think he was, Great Garbo?

Behind the locked door, Doctor Kurt Spangler rubbed his shining bald head and listened benignly to the disgruntled din.

"Maybe I should oughta give 'em an interview, huh, Doc?" The pink mountain of flesh lying on the rubbing table lifted a head the general size of an eggplant. "I don't want they should think I'm a louse."

The un-Masked Angel blinked, his little brown eyes apologetic beneath the shadows of brows ridged with the compounded scar tissue of countless ancient cuts and contusions.

"Never mind what they think," Doc Spangler beamed comfortingly. "Let them revile you—hate you." His sonorous voice sank confidingly. "It's exactly what we want."

THE Angel sighed unhappily. His head dropped back on the rubbing table as the two handlers pulled off his gloves, tossed them in a corner, and proceeded to rip off the hand-wrappings of gauze and tape.

"The more the newspapers hate you," Doc Spangler expounded, "the more they'll pay to see you get beaten." He rubbed his hands, considering the Angel with all the pride a farmer might display surveying his prize hog.

"Kid McCoy, for instance," the Doctor illustrated. "He made a fortune on the hatred of the mob. They paid to see him fight in the hope he would be slaughtered. Only he never was—not till after he became champion, anyway. And neither will you be, my lad. Not as long as you continue to follow my instructions."

The Angel grunted as Karl, one of his handlers, kneaded the mountainous mesa of his belly. His naked body, a pink mass of monstrous convexities, gleamed beneath the bright incandescents with a sheen of oily sweat that highlighted the ruby splotches where Torpedo Smith's gloves had exploded.

His flat button nose and the distorted rosettes of flesh that were his ears, furnished further evidence that Doctor Spangler's discovery, far from being a supernova in the pugilistic firmament, was actually a battle-scarred veteran, the survivor of an unnumbered multitude of beatings.

"I did like you said wit' Smith, didn't I, Doc?" the Angel mumbled.

"You did, indeed! You followed my instructions to the letter tonight. Always remember to keep covered till your man seems a bit careless." Spangler patted one beefy shoulder. "You were great tonight, my boy."

The Angel lifted his undersized noggin, a grateful grimace on his pear-shaped face.

"Thanks, Doc." He sank back. "I always try to do like you say." He sighed like a deflating dirigible. "But why do the crowd gotta t'ink I'm a crumb? I radder they should like me. I like *them*."

Doc Spangler sighed patiently, but was spared the need for further exposition by an increased burst of banging on the door. He turned resignedly to the fox-faced thug who was unlacing the Angel's ring shoes.

"Maxie, perhaps you'd better go out and have a word with our journalistic friends."

Maxie nodded briefly. He went to the door, yanked it open and stepped outside into a stream of vivid excoriation.

Doc Spangler listened a moment with admiration as the reporters' protests faded gradually down the hall.

Karl, the other henchman, had ceased his ministrations and was listening with a certain degree of envy. "Doc," he suggested, "maybe I should go and help chase 'em away, yah?" His accent was a curious blend of Yorkville kraut and Bowery bum.

Doc Spangler smiled, glancing at the half open door. Only Maxie's distant profanities were still audible, and that too finally ceased.

"I think Maxie has everything under control," Spangler said pleasantly. "Better finish removing the Angel's shoes so he can take his shower and get dressed. We've got to have some supper."

The Angel heaved up to a sitting position. "I'm hungry," he announced heavily. "I wanna double porterhouse and shoe-string potaters."

Spangler's colorless eyes flitted tenderly over the Angel's three-storied bay-window.

"You'll have a triple filet-mignon with truffles a la Waldorf Astoria three times a day if we win the title."

The Angel grinned dully.

"Leave it to me, Doc. I'll take Nelson."

"Of course you will—if you'll always remember to do exactly as I tell you. It was only by obeying my instructions that you got through that first round tonight—and don't forget it. *I* won that fight for you, my lad."

"Congratulations," said the Saint.

"Yeah," Hoppy rasped, kicking the door shut behind them. "Nice woik, Doc."

FOR a paralyzed second, Doctor Spangler, Karl, and the massive Angel composed a tableau of staring surprise. Then Spangler's florid wattles grew even more crimson.

"Who the—"

"Forgive us," the Saint interrupted. He took the cigarette from his mouth and flicked the ash reflectively, indicating Mr. Uniatz, who stood beside him with the black snout of a big automatic protruding from one hairy fist. "My friend and I couldn't resist the temptation, Doctor—especially when your man left the door to pursue those reporters down the hall."

He forbore to add that Maxie was, at the moment, reposing peacefully in a corridor broom closet where Hoppy had stuffed him after an exceedingly brief encounter.

"Put away the gun, Hoppy," he reproved. "This is strictly social."

Hoppy obeyed slowly. He was staring at the naked mass of the Angel as if what mental equipment he possessed failed utterly to accept the evidence of his eyes.

"Ged oudda here," Karl grated tonelessly.

His voice, like his bushy-browed eyes, was flat, dull, and deadly. The Saint appraised him with a glance—a short, squat, powerfully constructed character whose prognathous jaw matched the cubist lines of his shoulders.

"For de luvva mike!" Incredulous

amazement raised Hoppy's bullfrog bass a full octave. Rapturous recognition slowly illumined his corrugated countenance like dawning sunlight on a rockpile. *"Bilinski!"* he shouted. "Barrel House Bilinski!"

The Angel, who had been favoring Hoppy with the same open-mouthed concentration, slid slowly off the edge of the table to his feet. A reciprocal light dawned on the fuzzy horizon of his memory and spread over his humpty-dumpty face in a widening grin.

"For Pete's sake! Hoppy Uniatz!"

They practically fell into each other's arms.

"Well, well, well," the Saint drawled. "Old Home Week."

"Are *you* de Masked Angel?" Hoppy burbled with hoarse delight.

"Yeah, sure, Hoppy, dat's me!"

"Boss, dis is Barrel House Bilinski. Barrel House, meet de Saint!"

"Ged oudda here!"

Karl's voice rose half a decibel, his right hand sliding toward a pocket.

"I wouldn't if I were you, comrade." The Saint smiled deprecatingly, a glint in his eyes like summer lightning in a blue sky. His hand was thrust negligently in a pocket of his beautifully tailored sports jacket. "I'd hate having to put a hole through this coat, but your navel is such a tempting target."

Karl's hand dropped to his side.

"Doc, this is me old chum from way back when!" The Angel turned to Spangler eagerly. "Hoppy Uniatz!"

"Delighted. Now, Karl," Doc Spangler said reproachfully, "don't be a boor."

"Me and Barrel House useta beat each udder's brains out every week!" Hoppy effervesced hoarsely. "We barnstorm all over de country oncet. One week I win, next week he wins. What a team!"

"I can imagine," the Saint murmured.

Spangler smiled at Simon with revived benevolence.

"I might have known who you were, Mr. Templar, but you rather caught me by surprise, you know. I hardly expected a visit from the Saint at this particular moment."

"The pleasure," Simon bowed, "is all mine."

"Not at all, my dear fellow. I've rather expected this visit at some time or another, knowing of your parasitic propensities."

The Saint lifted an eyebrow.

"Parasitic?"

Doctor Spangler chuckled.

"Forgive me. I was merely referring to your habit of living on other people's enterprises."

"Meaning, no doubt, that you think I've come for a cut of your take in the Masked Angel—is that it?"

Spangler shrugged deprecatingly.

"What else?"

"Doc, whassa matter, huh?" the Angel queried with a puzzled grin which exposed several broken teeth. "What's he want?"

"Take it easy, Barrel House," Hoppy rumbled. "Dis is strictly social."

The Saint laughed.

"You're wrong, doctor."

"Am I?" Spangler said. "I've always known that at some unexpected point in the strange geometry of providence our paths must surely cross some day. We have much in common, Templar. I think that we would work well together."

MOCKERY danced in Simon's azure eyes.

"You must be psychic, Doctor, to have recognized me so quickly. I can't recall our ever having met before."

"True." Spangler nodded graciously. "However, your face has appeared in the public prints on several occasions I can recall."

"And so has yours," said the Saint reminiscently—"generally tacked on post office walls beneath the word 'Wanted'."

Spangler chuckled.

"You amuse me."

The light in Simon's eyes settled into two steely points.

"Then laugh *this* off. Torpedo Smith is dead."

The startled sag of the fat man's jaw was too sincere a reflex for simulation.

"He's coming in," Simon whispered. "Don't make a sound." (Chap. VI)

His stare shifted uncertainly to Karl standing beside him.

"Vot der —!" Karl's beetling black brows matched his sneering scowl. "You tryin' to scare somebody, hah?"

The Angel scratched his jaw bewilderedly, the whole unlovely mass of his gross nakedness quivering like jelly as he turned to his manager.

"Dead?" he muttered stupidly. "He's dead?"

Hoppy nodded admiringly.

"He won't never be no deader. Whereja get dat punch, chum? Why, when we was togedder, you smelled."

"My dear sir," Spangler said, regarding the Saint with watchful deliberation, "if this is an attempt at humor—"

"You needn't laugh now," Simon assured him pleasantly. "Save it for later —when the police get here. They should be along at any moment."

The Angel licked his lips tremulously.

"Jeez, Doc . . . I croaked him. I croaked de Torpedo."

"He's lying!" Karl sneered. "Smith cannot be dead!"

"Listen." The Saint glanced at the door. "I think I hear them now."

They followed his gaze, listening.

And while they stood intently frozen, the Saint sauntered casually to the corner where Karl and Maxie had tossed the Angel's gloves, and scooped them up in one sweeping motion.

Doctor Spangler turned quickly.

"What are you doing? Put down those gloves!" Alarmed suspicion darkened his colorless eyes. *"Karl! Angel!"*

His voice broke shrilly.

Bilinski went into motion uncertainly, as if still wondering what he was called on to do. But with a playful push as gentle as the thrust of a locomotive piston, Hoppy shoved him back to a sitting position on the edge of the rubbing table.

"Aw, don't mind him, Barrel House," he grinned, "he's just noivous."

He stuck out a foot to trip Karl who, gun in hand, was diving for cover behind the table.

The Saint moved with the speed of

lightning, kicking the gun from the sprawling thug's hand with all the vicious grace of a savate champ.

"Whassamatter?" the Angel blinked bewilderedly.

Karl struggled to all fours. It was a strategic error; for he presented, for one irresistible moment, his rear end to Mr. Uniatz's ecstatic toe in an explosive junction that flung him end over end into the shower-stall across the room.

"Help!" Spangler shouted. "Max! Max! Hel—"

His cry broke in a gasping grunt as the Saint's fist buried itself a good six inches in his paunch, collapsing him to the floor like a deflated blimp.

"Nice woik, boss," Hoppy congratulated.

"Hey, what's the big idea?" the Angel demanded, his confusion crystallizing into a fuzzy awareness that the isotope of friendship had somehow, somewhere, exploded.

He struggled off the edge of the rubbing table.

"Aw, relax, ya fat slob!" Hoppy recommended affectionately.

He clarified his suggestion with a shove that had all the delicate tact of an impatient rhinoceros slamming full tilt into a bull elephant; and the Angel, unbalanced, staggered backwards, knocking over the rubbing table and going down with it in something of a cosmic crash.

"All right, Hoppy," Simon called from the door as he removed the key. "Don't let's wear out our welcome."

He handed the gloves to Hoppy as they stepped out into the corridor and locked the door behind them. As they turned to leave, other gruff voices echoed faintly along the corridor leading from the end of the ramp; and the Saint's white teeth flashed in a satiric grin as he recognized the terse tonalities of the Law.

"The other way, Hoppy," he said, and turned in the opposite direction.

They sped swiftly through the underground maze toward the basement exits that opened into the street at the other end.

CHAPTER IV

HOPPY UNIATZ eased the big convertible adroitly through the midnight traffic and past the bright lights of the Times Square district then suddenly gave vent to a cosmic complaint.

"Boss," he announced with the wistful appeal of an arid hippopotamus being driven past a water-hole. "I gotta t'oist. Exercise always gives a t'oist, boss."

"Keep going," the Saint commanded inexorably. His long brown fingers were carefully probing the gloves on his lap. "You can refresh yourself after we get home."

Hoppy sighed and trod on the accelerator again.

"Anyt'ing in dem gloves, boss?"

"I can't feel anything."

Simon lifted a glove and sniffed it thoughtfully. He rubbed his finger over the damp leather and tasted it.

"Barrel House musta loined how to speed up his punch," Hoppy ruminated. "De fat slob always can hit like a mule, but he never is able to land it much when I know him. He's too slow." Hoppy shook his head in perplexity. "Imagine *him* bein' de Masked Angel! Doc Spangler musta teached him plenty."

"I wonder," said the Saint.

"But, whatever the secret of the Angel's success, Simon was certain now that it didn't lie in his gloves. There was nothing wrong with them that he could determine. No weights in the padding, no chemicals impregnated in the leather.

He'd seen enough of Bilinski's handwraps to determine that there had been no illegal substance compounded therein. And yet the abrupt transformation of a dull-witted hulk into an invincible gladiator with lethal lightning in his fists was too obvious a discord in the harmony of logic.

The action of that fatal second round

leading up to Torpedo Smith's collapse passed through the Saint's memory again, slowed down to a measured succession of mental images.

"Hoppy," the Saint reflected, "did you see that first blow which started the Torpedo on his way out?"

"Sure, boss." Hoppy nodded positively. "Barrel House catches him in de ropes."

"Did he hit him with a right or a left?"

"He hits him wit' both hands—lotsa times. *You* seen it."

The Saint said, "I know. But I mean that very first punch—the one that dazed Smith and laid him open for the other blows. Did you see that particular punch?"

"Sure I see it, boss. We bot' see it."

Hoppy yanked the car around a final corner and braked to a halt in front of a canopy that stretched from the Gothic doorway of a skyscraper apartment building to the curb.

"If you remember it so well," Simon pursued patiently, "what was it—a right or a left?"

"Why, it wuz a right, a—no, it was a left. A hook. Or maybe—" Hoppy hesitated, his vestigial brows furrowing painfully. "Maybe it was an uppercut dere against de ropes. He is t'rowin' so many punches, I wouldn't know."

"That's what I thought."

The memory of Connie Grady's enigmatic anxiety and her confused half-explained fears for Steve Nelson's life rose in swelling reprise, cued in with the discord of tonight's events like the opening movement of a concerto that gave promise of much more to come.

Simon got out, the gloves dangling from his hand by their laces. He entered the lobby of the building with Hoppy at his heels. They headed for the elevators.

"Maybe we oughta send out for sump'n to drink, huh, boss?" Hoppy suggested.

The Saint glanced at him. "Send *who?*"

Hoppy glanced around, becoming aware that the lobby was deserted, the desk man and lift operators being off duty.

"It's after midnight, chum," the Saint pointed out as they entered the automatic elevator. He pressed the button marked *"Penthouse."* The doors closed softly and the elevator purred skyward. "Besides," the Saint added as an afterthought, "I believe there's half a bottle of bourbon left."

Mr. Uniatz looked at him gloomily. "Yeah, boss. I know. Half a bottle—and me wit' a t'oist!"

"Mix it with a little water and make it go farther," Simon suggested helpfully.

"Water?" Hoppy stared incredulously. "De stuff what you wash wit'?"

THE Saint smiled absently, thinking of other things.

"You're definitely no child of Aquarius, Hoppy!"

Hoppy blinked with mild stupefaction, pondered a moment and gave up.

"No, I guess not," he sighed. "I wuz de child of Mr. and Mrs. Uniatz."

The elevator stopped and they stepped out.

"I meant the sign you were born under." Simon unlocked the door and entered the apartment. "From the way you drink, you must have been born under Pisces."

Hoppy's eyes widened in wonder at this hitherto unimagined vista of biological phenomena.

"Who, me? How did dat happen?"

The Saint shrugged, tossing the gloves on the living room divan as he turned on lights.

"I don't know," said the Saint. "It must have been shady there."

He tossed the gloves on the divan, flung himself down beside them, and stretched his long legs luxuriously, while Hoppy struggled briefly with his Delphic observation and then discarded the entire subject as the bottle on the sideboard caught his eyes.

"Me tongue's hangin' out," he muttered.

He made a bee-line for the half-bottle of Kentucky dew, throttling it with

an enormous hairy paw as he lifted it to his mouth. His Adam's apple plunged in convulsive rhythm as the contents lowered an inch a second, a full four seconds elapsing before he straightened his neck again, halted in mid-swallow by the pop of a cork.

The Saint had a fresh bottle of bourbon on his lap and was reaching for a glass from the top of a cabinet by the divan.

Hoppy's mouth pursed in hurt reproach.

"So *dat's* why it's locked," he deduced aggrievedly.

"And a good thing, too," the Saint said.

He recorked the bottle, gathered the Angel's gloves on his lap, and savored the drink with sybaritic enjoyment. Then he proceeded to reexamine the gloves—not that he expected them to yield any more secrets, but he had to be quite certain.

"Ya figure de mitts is loaded, boss?" Hoppy picked up one of the gloves. "Is dat why you want 'em?"

Simon considered him.

"Did you work that out all by yourself?"

He tossed the remaining glove aside and picked up his glass again. Hoppy took the glove he had thrown down and felt that one, too.

"Ain't nut'n de matter wit' dese gloves, boss."

The telephone rang.

It was Pat, her voice a stiletto in a silken sheath.

"Simon dear, it isn't that I mind being abandoned like a sinking ship—"

"Darling," said the Saint, "I've never been called a rat more delicately."

"However," she interrupted determinedly, "you could at least have phoned me as soon as you got home. I've been sitting here expecting a call every minute. What happened? Where did you go? I waited at the Arena until the cleaning people nearly swept me out."

"Good lord! I told you to go on home."

"I know, but after you disappeared down that ramp I figured you would come up again. You never did."

"Darling—"

"Don't darling me. After the police went down and never came up again either, I went out to find your car. But that was gone, too."

"You poor baffled child," he commiserated tenderly. "Hoppy and I took it. There was another exit. Several, in fact,"

"I happen to have figured that out quite some time ago," she said sweetly. "What happened? What was that shouting and crashing going on down there?"

"Oh, that," the Saint murmured. "Doc Spangler lost his key, so I suppose the police had to break down the door."

"Lost his key! What key?"

"The key I have in my pocket."

"B-but—" She broke off. "Simon, if you're going to be coy—"

"Not at all. Come over for breakfast and I'll try to give you a general idea about what happened."

"And just what has your little colleen, Connie Grady, got to do with all this?"

"I haven't decided yet. We'll talk about it at breakfast."

"I'll be there," she said ominously. "And it had better be good."

"It will be. The freshest eggs, the crispest bacon, the best butter—"

"I don't mean that. Good night, Lothario."

Simon thoughtfully pulled off a shoe.

HOPPY UNIATZ had disposed of the remains of his pint, and had taken advantage of the interruption to begin a strategic circling maneuver towards the Saint's bottle. This was a more or less instinctive gravitation. His receding brow was grooved by a stream of excogitation that flowed with all the gusto of a glacier towards its terminal moraine.

"Boss," Hoppy ruminated, "I got an idea."

The Saint kicked off the other shoe.

"Be kind to it, Hoppy," he yawned. "It's in a strange place."

BUT Hoppy, lost in contemplation of a glorious tomorrow evolving from the stuff of his dreams, went on unheeding.

"Dis fat slob, Bilinski, who is de Masked Angel. He beats de champ. Dat makes *him* de Champ, don't it?"

The Saint eyed him curiously. "He hasn't beaten him yet."

"But if Barrel House Bilinski gets de crown," Hoppy continued with growing inspiration, "dey is one guy who can take it away from him. Dey is one guy who can knock him on his can any day in de week. Dat's me, boss! If dat fat slob gets de champeenship, I'm de guy what can take it away from him. Den I'll be de Champ and you'll be my manager!"

The telephone rang again.

"Excuse me," said the Saint. "My bottle seems to be moving towards your hand."

He rescued it in the nick of time and picked up the phone.

He recognized at once the soft husky lilt of the voice.

"I—I do hope you'll forgive my calling you at this hour," Constance Grady apologized hurriedly. "I called several times after I—I thought you might have gotten home, but there was no answer."

"I just got in," Simon explained. "I didn't have a chance to call you after the fight as I'd promised, and I thought it was rather late to phone you now. But," he added quickly, "I'm glad you called. Thanks for the tickets."

"Thank you for using them." She hesitated, her voice dropping almost to a whisper. "You—you saw what happened?"

"Yes. Very interesting."

A slight pause. Then, "My father came home a few minutes ago. He's very upset. I—I made an excuse that I had to go to an all-night drugstore on the corner to get some aspirin. I'm talking to you from there."

"I see." The Saint's voice was speculative. "Naturally, he *would* be upset by tonight's accident."

"Accident? . . . Yes, I know." She hesitated again. "There was something else—something about you and that—that man you call Hoppy. You went into the Masked Angel's dressing room after the fight. Daddy said there was a brawl."

"I wouldn't say that," Simon said gravely. "One of Doctor Spangler's assistants happened to trip on one of Hoppy's big feet and knocked himself out. The Angel fell over a table, causing Doctor Spangler to get the wind knocked out of him."

"But . . . You didn't go down to see this—Masked Angel because you saw something wrong?"

"Wrong? No, Connie, if you mean fouling or anything like that, I didn't see a thing. By the way, it seems the Masked Angel is one of Hoppy's old chums."

"Oh."

"What makes you think there was anything wrong?"

"I don't know. I'm—I'm just afraid." Her answer was just as vague now as it had been the first time. "I thought you might have been able to see something or figure something out."

"Why not drop in for breakfast and we'll talk it over?"

"All right." She seemed reluctant to finish, and yet unable to find an excuse to go on. "And thanks again."

The Saint poured himself another drink, and surrendered the bottle.

"Who was dat, boss?" Hoppy asked.

"A lady," Simon replied, "who is holding out on me."

"You can't trust 'em, boss," Hoppy affirmed, shaking his head. "None of 'em. I know a doll once." He sighed, shaking his head like a wistful grizzly. "She has coives like a—a—"

"A scenic railway?" Simon suggested.

Hoppy beamed.

"Dat wuz Fanny, boss! All over! I can see her now." He sighed with the stentorian nostalgia of a libidinous walrus. "She was de goil of my dreams!"

The Saint yawned and turned to the bedroom.

"Let's go see her there," he said.

The doorbell rang. Simon halted in

his tracks. Ghostly caterpillars crawled along his backbone. Instinct whispered its warning of further explosions in the chain reaction he had started that night. The clamor of the bell came as if on a long awaited cue. A faint smile flitted over his reckless mouth.

"Who is dat dis time of night?" Hoppy wondered.

"Open the door and find out," Simon told him.

Mr. Uniatz slipped a meaty hand into his gun pocket and strode out into the foyer to the doorway.

The Saint heard the door open. He grinned as he recognized the imperative voice that answered Hoppy's gruff inquiry. The determined clomp of hard-heeled brogans entered the foyer, heading for the living room door.

"Boss," Hoppy trumpeted in warning, "it's—"

"Don't tell me," the Saint broke in cheerfully. "Give me one guess—Inspector Fernack!"

CHAPTER V

DEVOTED students who have been following these chronicles for the past several years may be a little tired of reading the exposition of Inspector John Henry Fernack's emotional state which usually punctuates the narrative at moments like this. Your favorite author, to be perfectly candid, is a little tired of writing it. Perhaps this is one occasion when he might be excused.

To compress into a few sentences the long epic of failures, disappointments and frustrations which made up the history of Inspector Fernack's endless pursuit of the Saint is a task before which the staunchest scribe might quail. And it is almost ludicrous to attempt to describe in mere words the quality of incandescent ire that seethed up in him like a roiled volcano as the Saint's welcoming smile flashed in the chiselled bronze of that piratical face.

"Of course," Simon murmured. "I knew it."

The detective glowered at him.

"How did you know?"

"My dear John Henry!" the Saint grinned. "That concerto you played on my doorbell was unmistakably a Fernack arrangement." He waved him to a chair. "Sit down, won't you? Let me pour you a drink—if Hoppy can spare it."

"Sure," said Mr. Uniatz hospitably. "Just don't take all of it."

Inspector Fernack did not sit down. In fact, he looked more as if he might easily rise into the air, from the sheer pressure of the steam that seemed to be distending his chest.

For the same routine was going to be played out again, and he knew it, without being able to do anything to check or vary its course. It was all implicit in the Saint's gay and friendly smile; and the bitterness of the premonition put a crack in his voice even while he ploughed doggedly onwards to his futile destiny.

"Never mind that!" he squawked. "What were you and this big baboon raising Cain about in the Masked Angel's dressing room tonight?"

"You mean *last* night, don't you? It happens to be tomorrow morning at the moment."

"I'm asking you," Fernack repeated deliberately, "what were you doing—"

"It's funny," the Saint interjected, "all the places where a flying rumor will land."

"It's no rumor!" Inspector Fernack said trenchantly. "I was at the fight myself." He removed the stogie from his mouth and took a step forward, his gimlet eyes challenging. "Why did you steal those gloves?"

The Saint's brows lifted in polite surprise.

"Gloves?"

"Yes, gloves! The gloves that killed Torpedo Smith! Doc Spangler told me what happened. Why'd you take 'em?"

"My hands were cold," Simon said blandly.

"An imaginative audience might have

fancied that it could hear the perspiration sizzling on Inspector Fernack's face as its rosy glow deepened to purple.

He thrust the stogie back into his mouth with a violence that almost choked him.

"You be careful, Templar!" he bellowed. "If I felt like it, I could pull you in for assault, trespass, malicious mischief *and* petty larceny."

Simon shook his head sadly.

"You disappoint me, Inspector. A hunter of your caliber talking about sparrows when there are tigers in them thar hills."

"You don't say!" Fernack's cigar angled upward like a naval rifle. "Meaning what?"

The Saint shrugged.

"Well, almost anything is more interesting than"—amusement flickered in the lazy-lidded, hawk-sharp blueness of his eyes, as he enumerated on his fingers—"Assault, trespass, malicious mischief, *and* petty larceny."

The cigar made another trip from Inspector Fernack's face to his fist, and suffered further damage in transit.

"All right, Saint," Fernack ground out, "what are you up to? And don't give me that look of injured innocence. You didn't crash that dressing room just for the exercise."

"We wanted de Angel's autograft," Hoppy contributed helpfully.

The inspector whirled on him.

"I didn't ask *you!*" he blared, with such ferocity that even Hoppy recoiled.

"John Henry," the Saint mused wistfully, "our association through the years has been a beautiful thing but there are moments when you really embarrass me."

"I'll bet."

"Why should you take Spangler's word that *I* stole those gloves? You know what *he* is. Besides, what makes you think there's anything wrong with them? What was the doctor's opinion as to the cause of death?"

INSPECTOR FERNACK placed the cigar in his mouth, his eyes fixed on the Saint.

"Concussion," he said. "We'll get the medical examiner's report in the morning."

The Saint nodded.

"Concussion. Undoubtedly caused by the psychic dynamite that Doc Spangler has put in the Angel's punch."

"Or by a hunk of lead in one of those gloves!" the inspector growled.

His eyes wandered searchingly about the room.

The Saint said, "You spoke to the Masked Angel, of course?"

"I spoke to him. Why?"

"What is *his* theory, if any?"

"*His* theory!" Inspector Fernack snorted scornfully. "Why, that moron Bilinski doesn't know he's alive! But he's staying in jail till we find those gloves, understand?" His eyes narrowed. "How long have you known Bilinski? How did you recognize him as the Masked Angel? Is he a friend of yours?"

The Saint smiled wryly.

"Please, Inspector," he protested. "My social standing is not indestructible." He turned to Hoppy. "Well," he sighed, "if it's a matter of getting your little playmate out of the cooler, you'd better bring the inspector his souvenirs."

"Okay, boss."

"I thought so!" Inspector Fernack bared his teeth in uneasy triumph.

HOPPY shuffled to the divan, bent over, and reached under it.

"Here dey are!" he announced, hauling them out. He thrust the damp leather mitts at Fernack with all the graciousness of a dyspeptic mastodon. "Take 'em!"

The Saint selected a cigarette from the silver box on the table.

"I borrowed them for the same reason you want them," he said. "I was afraid there'd be a substitution before you thought of it."

He held a lighter to his cigarette, smiling at the inspector over its little golden spear point of flame.

Fernack scowled, staring at the Saint for a longish moment.

"So that's your story!" he began with an imminent crescendo. "Now let me tell you . . ."

And there, in a hopeless anticlimax, he stopped. Calling memories of past pitfalls into which his headlong suspicions had tripped him in previous encounters with the Saint seemed for once to take all the conviction out of his attack.

For what, after all, was he going to tell the Saint? That he was under arrest for stealing a pair of boxing gloves?

The Saint was engagingly frank.

"I examined them carefully, John Henry," he said, "and they're really quite in order, believe me. None of the stitches has been tampered with or the lining torn or any chemical, such as oil of mustard, soaked into the leather.

"I also had a look at Bilinski's handwraps. No plaster of paris, pads of tinfoil or calking compound. No hunks of lead."

"All right, wise guy!" Fernack exploded. "If these *are* the gloves, the police lab will tell me all that I want to know!"

THE Saint spread his hands with mock resignation, laughter sparkling in his cobalt eyes.

"Of course, John Henry, if you don't believe *me*. However, if you should ever feel the need of any further enlightenment, always remember that our motto is service. Sure you won't change your mind about that drink?"

"All right!" Fernack grated, repeating himself. "Be a wise guy. Play the lone wolf. But remember this, Templar. Sooner or later you're going to make a false move, a mistake you can't get out of. And when that happens, brother, I'll be right there waiting to tag you for it!"

"You an' who else?" Hoppy inquired brilliantly.

Inspector Fernack ignored him. He thrust a finger at the Saint.

"One of these days you're going to reach out just a little too far—and you're going to draw back a bloody stump!"

The Saint's face crinkled in a careless smile as he put his cigarette to his mouth.

And, as if by accident, its glowing tip touched the finger Inspector Fernack held under his nose.

The detective jerked his hand back with a yelp.

"Oh, sorry, John!" Simon exclaimed contritely. "That should teach me a lesson, shouldn't it?"

Fernack glared at him speechlessly. Then, thrusting the gloves under his arm, he turned and stalked out of the living room.

Simon followed him politely to the apartment's threshold.

"Good night," said the Saint, as Fernack yanked open the door. "If you should ever need me, you know where to find me."

"If I ever want you," Inspector Fernack growled, "I'll find you, don't worry."

[*Turn page*]

... ITS QUALITY
HITS THE SPOT!

CHAPTER VI

SIMON watched Fernack stride to the elevators, then quietly closed the door.

"Well," he sighed. "Now maybe we can get some sleep at last."

Hoppy yawned in soporific sympathy, but had enough presence of mind to reach for the bottle, which still contained an appreciable amount of fluid.

"I better have a nightcap," he explained. "I don't wanna stay awake t'inkin' about Torpedo."

"A nightcap that size," Simon observed, watching the level of the bottle descend alarmingly, "could double as a sleeping bag."

He retrieved what was left and poured it into a glass for a private relaxer of his own.

He tried to tot up what scores there were on hand, to determine exactly where he stood at the moment. He had to confess to himself that so far he'd been working with mists, trying to assemble a concrete pattern, a design out of stuff that emanated almost entirely from his intuitive processes.

The promise of hovering danger had dissolved in two unsatisfactory climaxes—the dressing room brawl and Fernack's visit. Unsatisfactory because they resolved nothing. The mystery of Connie Grady's agitation and the Masked Angel's incredible victory still stood as prime question marks.

But perhaps, he told himself, they weren't real question marks. Perhaps he'd been overdramatizing his perceptions. Connie was young and in love. Her fear for Steve's safety could well have inspired her strangely distraught plea. And the Masked Angel might have initially stunned Smith with such a short swift jab that his eye had missed it entirely.

He told himself this and knew he was kidding himself. He knew he had missed nothing in the fight. Therefore, there must have been something else—something that he still had to search for.

He stood up and stretched himself.

And once again the telephone rang.

"This is getting monotonous," he told himself as he lifted the instrument from its cradle.

"Templar's Telephone Chums, Incorporated," he said.

Silence.

It was a kind of receptive cylindrical silence, open at both ends.

"We're having a breakfast meeting at nine o'clock," Simon confided into the receiver. "Would you like to come, too?"

He heard a faint click, then a sudden blank deadness.

The Saint hung up thoughtfully; and an airless draught prickled along his nerves like a spectral breeze. It was a well-remembered sensation, a wave length registered on the sensitive antenna of a sixth sense which selected and amplified it throughout his being into an unmistakable alarm. Many times in the past it had warned him of impending danger and sudden death—just as it whispered to him now.

Someone had hung up as soon as he'd recognized the Saint's voice—someone who wanted to make sure he was there.

"Hoppy," he said, "something tells me we're going to have more visitors tonight."

Mr. Uniatz's cognitative machinery ground to an excruciating halt.

"What for, boss?"

"It's the price we pay for being so irresistibly attractive."

He was taking a rapid mental inventory of the room, until his eyes settled on a table lamp with a fairly long cord. He pulled the plug out of the baseboard outlet and broke the lamp cord off close to the lamp.

Hoppy stared at him.

"What gives, boss?"

The Saint nodded at the empty whisky bottle still clutched in Hoppy's hand.

"Take that dead soldier, go to the bathroom, fill it with water and bring it over there."

Hoppy lumbered off obediently. After

he had gone the Saint hurried into the bedroom. From a chest of drawers he took a slim leather case which, on being unzipped, revealed a highly specialized collection of peculiar articles.

Skipping the more obviously illegal tools, he selected a small spool of copper wire, a roll of adhesive tape, and a razor-blade knife. Armed with these, he returned to the entrance hall, where Mr. Uniatz extended the whisky bottle to him as though it contained an unclean substance.

"Here's de water, boss. Whatcha gonna do wit' it?"

"Just hold it a minute," said the Saint. He began to cut several inches of insulation from the broken end of the lamp cord. "We are preparing a phylactery against zombies," he explained.

Hoppy's jaw sagged.

"We're preparin' a what against who?"

"An apotropaion, so to speak," the Saint elucidated.

Hoppy moved nervously aside as the Saint went to the front door and taped one of the two strands of the lamp cord against the metal door knob. He watched in silent wonder as the Saint unrolled a length of copper wire, wound the spool-end a couple of times around the radiator pipe, and slipped the other end under the door until it projected a foot into the hall outside.

"All right, Hoppy. Give me the bottle."

Simon stepped outside and carefully poured the water on the tile floor in front of his door so that the protruding wire lay in a shallow puddle. He walked a few paces down the corridor, turned to study the approach of the living room door, then came back.

"Boss," Hoppy sighed, voicing his perennial complaint, "I don't get it."

"You will," said the Saint.

He fastened the other bared end of the drop cord to the radiator with another strip of adhesive and carefully closed the door. Finally, he pushed the plug into a nearby baseboard outlet, and turned to Hoppy. "Well," he said "there it is."

Hoppy stared at the closed door. His lucubratory processes, oozing like a glutinous stream between narrow banks, at last achieved a spreading delta of cognition. A slow enchanted grin dissolved his facial fog like sunlight on a jungle swamp.

"Chees, boss," he said in awesome incredulity, "I do get it!"

"Congratulations."

"In case de zombies you're expectin' should touch de doorknob," Hoppy deduced triumphantly. His eyes were worshipful. "Ya even got de water puddle grounded, huh?"

THE Saint laid his hand on Hoppy's shoulder in an accolade.

"Nothing escapes your eagle eye, does it?"

"Oh, I got experience in dis line, boss," Mr. Uniatz acknowledged deprecatingly. "Once I do a job on a mug's car wit' a stick of dynamite wired to de starter. De whole mob says it's one of de biggest laughs I ever give dem."

The Saint surveyed his work with an artist's satisfaction.

"That water grounded to the radiator should lend some authority even to one hundred and ten volts—especially if he's in his stockinged feet." He turned, picking up the wire, knife, and tape and headed back toward his bedroom. "Let's grab some shut-eye while we can. It'll be daybreak in a few hours.

* * *

It was two hours later when he opened his eyes, instantly and completely awake. He lay motionless save for the silent closing of his fingers on the gun at his side, every nerve alive and singing as he sought to pin down whatever it was that had alerted him. From the next bed Hoppy's snoring rose and fell in majestic rhythm.

Then he heard it—a faint scratching of metal—and recognized it instantly.

A skeleton key was probing the front door lock.

He was out of bed and on his feet in one smooth soundless motion, laying a hand on Hoppy's mouth. The snoring

ceased abruptly. Simon spoke in his ear, and Hoppy's groggy eruption died aborning. He relaxed, and the Saint removed his hand.

"Listen."

The faint scratching of metal was barely audible.

Hoppy nodded, one hand groping for the gun under his pillow, his anticipatory grin almost as luminous as the moonlight that poured through the window.

"De zombies!" he hissed in a resounding whisper that brought Simon's hand back upon his mouth again.

"Quiet!" the Saint breathed savagely.

There was a brief silence, and it seemed for a moment as if the man working on the door had indeed heard him. Then it came again—a scrape of metal—and suddenly the metallic click of tumblers falling into alignment, and the snick of an opening bolt.

"He's coming in," Simon whispered in Hoppy's ear. "Don't make a sound or I'll brain you with this gun-butt."

He took his hand off Hoppy's mouth and moved with the effortless ease of a cat through the living room. He could hear the creak of the bed as Hoppy got out and padded after him. They paused by the archway to the entrance hall, staring into the darkness, intent on the pale rectangle of the front door.

As they waited there, the Saint couldn't help feeling that somehow, despite his conviction that this visit rose from his recent conflict with Spangler, it didn't quite add up. For he thought he knew Spangler's character pretty thoroughly; and so primitive a motive as revenge simply didn't agree with his knowledge of the man.

Revenge for revenge's sake was a luxury too expensive—and dangerous—to be compatible with Doc Spangler's conservative nature. The worthy doctor might have better reason later on, but so far the Saint couldn't imagine him going to so much trouble merely to assuage a sore belly.

There was another moment of silence. Then, without hearing it, but almost as if he sensed a fractional change in the air-pressure, the Saint knew that the front door was starting to open.

Hoppy edged past Simon, as though straining on a leash.

Then several things occurred in such swift succession that they had the effect of happening almost all at once. A sizzling shower of golden sparks flamed from the doorknob. A wild howl split the silence. There was a mad scramble of slipping feet, the thud of a falling body, the blast of a gunshot, and the rattle of plaster cascading to the floor.

The Saint and Hoppy leaped forward almost on top of the gunman's yell, with Hoppy ahead of Simon by virtue of his head start.

Simon's warning cry came too late.

Hoppy's joyous battle-bellow leaped to a yell of consternation as he grabbed the doorknob amid another constellation of sparks bursting about his hand. He leaped backwards, skidding on a rug and sat down with a cosmic crash in front of the doorway.

The Saint ripped the cord from the electric outlet with one hand, reached over with the other and tried to pull open the door against Hoppy's obstructing weight.

"Okay, boss, okay!" Hoppy grunted protestingly as Simon rolled him over with a yank at the door.

He scrambled to his feet and the Saint disappeared into the hallway. But even as he snatched open the front door, Simon knew that the quarry had escaped.

The "In Use" signal light of the automatic elevator gleamed at him in yellow derision.

Hoppy charged past him and skidded to a halt.

"Where'd he go, huh? Where'd he go?" he demanded feverishly.

Then he caught the glow of the elevator signal light and whirled for the stairs.

The Saint grabbed his arm and stopped him.

"Come back, Pluto," he said morosely. "That elevator will be at the bottom before you've gone down three flights."

CHAPTER VII

HE DRAGGED Hoppy back into the apartment as a murmur of alarmed voices, with a few doors opening and closing, drifted faintly up the stair well. Muttering to himself, Hoppy joined the Saint in the darkness before the living room window and stared down at the moon-silvered street before the building entrance far below.

Suddenly, as the realization that the intruder would probably be leaving by that exit dawned upon him, a vast feral grin spread over his face. He raised his gun.

The Saint noted the car parked before the building, a little distance behind his—a dark sedan that hadn't been there when he'd arrived that night. He caught a glimpse of hands in the moonlight—hands that carried an odd sparkle—resting on the visible portion of the steering wheel.

Hoppy crouched beside him, his big black automatic clutched in a hairy fist resting on the window-sill, and stared lynx-eyed at the canopied building entrance eighteen floors below. Presently he rasped in an awful tide of anxiety: "Boss, maybe he goes out de back—"

He broke off as a man darted out from under the canopy, a figure reduced to miniature, scurrying towards the parked sedan.

Mr. Uniatz raised his gun and was aiming carefully when Simon's hand clamped on his wrist in a grip of iron.

"*No!*" he ordered. "We'll only have Fernack back—and next time he won't be so easy to get rid of."

"Chees, boss!" Hoppy complained mournfully, staring at the sedan roaring down the street. "I had a bead on him."

"In the dark? Shooting downward at that distance?" Simon snapped. He turned away, crossing the living room. "Don't be a fool. Besides"—he stepped out of the darkness of the living room into the hallway—"there's been enough noise for one night."

Hoppy shuffled after him, muttering indignantly, "Nobody can gimme de business an' get away wit' it."

The Saint looked at him resignedly.

"Don't blame *him!* Grabbing that doorknob after I'd wired it was your own stupid fault."

"I wouldna done it if it wasn't for him," Hoppy insisted sullenly. "Besides, how do I know he can run like dat? All de zombies I ever seen in pitchers move slower dan Bilinski. Dis musta bin a new kind, boss. Maybe somebody gives him a hypo."

"Maybe somebody does," Simon agreed. "And the doc's name could be Spangler."

He switched the lights on at the entrance and looked around. The loose rug that had been involved in Hoppy's downfall was a tousled heap in the middle of the floor. When he lifted one corner to straighten it he saw the gun underneath it.

He picked it up gingerly—a heavy "banker's" model revolver with a two-inch barrel.

"Chees," Hoppy said, "de lug forgets his equalizer. Now all we gotta do is find out who it belongs to, an' we know who he is."

"That piece of logic," said the Saint, "has more holes in it than Swiss cheese. However—"

He broke off as he became aware that the elevator doors were opening in front of him. For one instant he was tense, with his forefinger curling instinctively on the trigger of the weapon in his hand. Then he saw the passenger clearly.

He was a rabbity little man, draped in a flowered bathrobe, with pince-nez supporting a long black ribbon.

"I," he enunciated pompously, "am your neighbor downstairs, Mr. Swafford. Has there been any trouble?"

He stepped back suddenly, with his eyes popping, as Hoppy moved into full view from behind the Saint.

"Trouble?" Simon inquired politely. "What sort of trouble?"

Mr. Swafford seemed hypnotized by the apparition glaring at him over the Saint's shoulder.

"I," he swallowed. "I—please forgive me," he said hastily, "but there was some rumor—about a shot, I think it was. Some people in the building seem to think it came from up here."

Simon turned to Hoppy.

"Did you hear a shot?"

Mr. Uniatz fixed Mr. Swafford with a basilisk glare. He growled, "Boss, dis guy must be nuts!"

Mr. Swafford gulped and amended hastily: "Of course, I don't say it came from your apartment. It was just what some of the tenants thought. They seem to have jumped to the conclusion that someone was being shot, but I assure you—"

"I'm sure," the Saint broke in pleasantly, "that there must be a more productive form of exercise than jumping at conclusions, don't you think, comrade?"

MR. SWAFFORD retreated another step. His eyes bulged wider as they confirmed their impression of the gun in the Saint's hand and the fallen shower of plaster from the ceiling.

"Oh, yes, of course," he said weakly.

"I'm sorry you were disturbed," said the Saint benevolently. "My friend here is just in from Montana, where men are men and have notches on their guns to prove it. When they're having fun, they just blaze away at the ceiling. I've just taken his six-shooter away and tried to explain to him—"

"Scram before I step on ya like a roach!" Hoppy bellowed, squeezing past the Saint.

Mr. Swafford stumbled backwards, his pince-nez dropping from his long nose and dangling by the ribbon. Without another word he scurried back into the elevator.

"Good night, Mr. Swafford," Simon called breezily, as the closing elevator doors blotted out the little man's pallid stare.

He turned back into the apartment, shutting the door behind him.

"Boss," Hoppy said, following him, "dis is gettin' monogamous. Just one t'ing after anudder."

"That sounds almost bovine to me," said the Saint. "But it'll probably get worse before it gets better."

He was positive that he had recognized the squat silhouette of Spangler's henchman, Max, fleeing from the building toward the waiting sedan. But he was still wondering, as he fell asleep, just why Doc Spangler had sent him.

* * *

Hoppy was in the penthouse kitchen frying bacon with concentrated absorption the next morning when the doorbell rang. The Saint, seated in the adjoining breakfast alcove, put down the morning paper and stood up.

"I'll get it, boss," Hoppy offered, laying down the fork in one hand and the comic section clutched in the other.

"Never mind," Simon strode across the kitchen. "I don't want to take your mind off Dick Tracy."

The opening door revealed a vision in daffodil yellow with hair to match and a quizzical smile.

"Pat!" Simon drew her in and held her at arm's length, boldly admiring. "You're a sight to be held!"

He suited the action to the word.

She laughed breathlessly, pulling away.

"Darling, you have one of the most elemental lines since Casanova."

His eyes caressed her figure. "The most elemental lines," he said, "are never spoken. They're looked at."

"Do I look as good as Connie?" she inquired with arched eyebrows.

"Much better." He took her hand and led her toward the kitchen. "Hoppy!" he called. "Bring on the vitamins."

"Comin' up, boss!" Hoppy sang out and came around to deposit a glass of pale amber liquid in front of her as she sat down. "Vitamins," he grinned, and retreated to his stove.

"Thank you," Pat smiled and lifted the glass.

"Wait." Simon reached over and

took the glass from her. He sniffed it. "I thought so!"

"What's the matter?" Pat asked. "Isn't it all right?"

He pushed the glass back.

"Smell it."

She sniffed the glass and sat up, laughing. "Brandy!"

Hoppy's head appeared over the top of the alcove partition.

"Whassamatter, boss?"

"Thanks for the compliment," said Patricia, "but I'm not quite up to your kind of fruit juice."

Mr. Uniatz's brow furrowed in hurt bewilderment.

"It's from grapes, ain't it? Grapes is fruit, ain't it?" He reached behind him and raised the bottle for all to behold. "It says so, right here on de label."

The Saint waved him away in despair.

"Never mind," he said. "Bring on the solid food."

"Okay, boss." Hoppy removed the offending liquor and drained it at a gulp. He went back into the kitchen and looked over the partition toward Pat. "Didja read about de fight in de paper dis mornin'?" he asked.

"They arrested the Masked Angel, didn't they?"

"But not for long," Hoppy said complacently. "We fix dat, don't we, boss?"

PAT'S clear eyes studied the Saint.

"What does he mean—you fixed it up?"

"We informed the law that the Masked Angel is an old chum of Hoppy's," Simon explained glibly. "Naturally, with that kind of a character reference, they're bound to let Bilinski go."

"I don't trust you," Patricia said coldly. "Not for a minute. What goes on?"

"Goes on?" The Saint's eyebrows lifted.

"I know you too well. You wouldn't have left me last night the way you did unless something had—"

She broke off as the doorbell sounded briefly.

"I'll let her in, boss," Hoppy said cheerfully, and tramped out of the kitchen.

"*Her?*" Patricia repeated. "Miss Grady, I presume?"

"A purely professional visit," he answered calmly. "After all, she *is* engaged to Steve Nelson."

Pat's cool red mouth curved cynically.

"A passing fiancé, no doubt."

Simon's eyes closed in pain.

"My dear girl," he protested.

He got to his feet as Hoppy trumpeted from the hallway.

"It's Connie Grady, Boss!"

She hesitated in the kitchen door, slim and dewy-fresh, her short black curls making her look very young and almost boyish.

"Come in, darling," said the Saint. He took her hand and led her to the breakfast alcove. "Miss Grady, this is my colleague, Miss Holm."

"Hullo, Connie," said Patricia sympathetically. "Welcome to the harem."

Connie Grady glanced uncertainly from Pat to Simon. "I—I didn't know you were having company," she said. "I didn't want to—"

"It's perfectly all right," Simon assured her. "Pat really is my colleague in many of my enterprises. Anything you say to me you can say to her with equal freedom." He waved at Hoppy. "That's another of my colleagues—Hoppy Uniatz."

"Likewise, I'm sure," Hoppy beamed. "I seen ya lotsa times when your pop was runnin' de old Queensbury Gym, remember? Ya useta bring him his lunch."

"Sit down," said Simon. "We're just starting."

CHAPTER VIII

THE Saint saw Connie settled in the booth and pulled up another chair for himself, while Mr. Uniatz doled out plates of bacon and eggs and cups of coffee with hash-house dexterity.

Connie picked up her fork and tried to start, but the effort of

restraint was too much.

She looked full at the Saint, a look of strain on her face.

"You saw what happened," she said, her voice small and tense. "The Angel killed a man last night . . . *Now,* do you wonder that I don't want Steve to fight that—that gorilla?"

"I can see your point."

"When I was talking to you last night," she began, "I— I—"

She fumbled as if groping for the right words.

Simon passed Patricia the sugar with harlequin courtesy. She didn't seem to see it.

She said sweetly, "Last night?"

"On the phone, after you called," Simon elucidated s m o o t h l y. "She wanted to know what went on, too. Her father was rather upset by our little visit to the Masked Angel's dressing room after the fight."

Patricia's red mouth pursed in a skeptical "Oh!"

Connie found the words at last. "I was hoping and praying they'd keep that man in jail—that the fight would be called off . . ." Her voice broke. "But they're releasing him."

"Are they?" Simon asked with interest. "I didn't see anything about it in my paper."

"Daddy was over at Police Headquarters first thing this morning with Spangler, the Masked Angel's manager."

The Saint nodded.

"I see. So they got the Angel out of the jug in spite of Hoppy's recommendation."

"Steve is going through with this fight if you don't do something about it." Connie Grady's voice strained against her self-control. "He'll be killed!"

Hoppy gulped on a mouthful that would have choked a horse.

"Killed? De champ? Why, he'll moider de bum!"

Connie turned on him sharply.

"You think so? After what the Masked Angel did to Torpedo Smith last night? That so-called bum has beaten every man he's fought."

"Under Doc Spangler's ministry, at least," the Saint amended.

"Aah, dey was fakes!" Hoppy derided.

"When Torpedo Smith was killed last night," she said tensely, "do you think *he* was faking?"

"You know, of course," Simon said to Connie, "who the Masked Angel really is, don't you?"

SHE nodded wearily.

"Yes, of course. Daddy owns part of him."

She looked up quickly, as if suddenly realizing what she had said. "I mean," she stumbled confusedly, "he doesn't have any interest in him directly—that is, not really. It's just that Spangler owes Daddy money, and—"

"Of course," Simon soothed gently, "I understand. It's just that Doc Spangler is paying off your father from his earnings on the Masked Angel."

She seemed grateful for the lead.

"Yes. Yes, that's it."

"After all," the Saint observed casually, "it's not considered ethical for a matchmaker to hold a financial interest in any of his contestants—or at least a major share—so naturally Mr. Grady would avoid that sort of thing. Especially where a championship bout was concerned."

Connie Grady looked up suddenly.

"I don't want Steve to be one of those contestants!" she burst out, her emerald eyes misting. She turned away. "I sound ridiculous, don't I? I—I wouldn't dream of asking this of anyone else in the world. You're the only person I could imagine being capable of arranging it so that the fight would never happen."

"Exactly what are you suggesting?" Pat asked curiously. "Do you think the Saint could persuade Nelson not to fight?"

Connie flashed her a startled glance.

"Oh, no!" she said. "If he knew I'd come here to ask Mr. Templar, he'd never forgive me." She turned to Simon pleadingly. "There must be some other way. I can't say how. I only know

that you've done things—in the past—that were like miracles. Daddy has told me about—some of your adventures."

"Well, well," said Patricia admiringly. "Simon Templar, the Paul Bunyan of modern crime. Have you another miracle up your sleeve?"

Then she caught the stricken look on Connie's face and her laughter softened. She put an arm about the girl's shoulders and looked up at the Saint questioningly.

"Simon, what do you think?"

"I think," said the Saint, "that we ought to go on with breakfast before it gets cold or Hoppy eats it."

He deliberately devoted himself to his own plate, and insisted on that matter-of-fact diversion until even Connie Grady had to follow with the others. He knew that the let-down was what she needed if she could be eased into it and, for his own part, a healthy appetite was mixed with the need for an interlude of constructive thinking in approximately equal proportions.

IF IT was obvious that Connie's concern for Steve Nelson was absolutely real, it was no less plain to the Saint that she still hadn't come out with everything that was on her mind.

He waited until the mechanics of eating had achieved an inevitable slackening of the tension, and then he said almost casually, "Of course one thing we might do is shoot Barrel House Bilinski."

"No, no," Connie gasped, but her tone was now more impatient than fearful. "I didn't mean anything like that. I don't want anybody hurt." She shook her head. "There must be something—something else you could do."

Simon considered the tip of his cigarette a moment while a thin stream of smoke trickled from his mouth.

"Does your father know you're here?" he asked.

"Of course not!" The idea seemed to startle her. "I couldn't tell him I'm trying to have the fight stopped—any more than I could tell Steve!"

"Steve is pretty good at his profession," Simon remarked. "Does he know how you feel about his chances against the Angel?"

"How could I tell him? I've tried to make him quit now—with the championship. It hasn't done any good. He's so sure, so confident! If he only had sense enough to be afraid, to realize!"

"Realize what?" Simon queried mildly.

"That it's not worth risking his life."

"He's retiring after this next fight, according to the newspapers," Patricia said.

"Yes, I know. He promised me . . . But it may be too late by then."

Hoppy was shaking his head uncomprehendingly.

"You talk like a cream puff," he said. "He's de Champ, ain't he?"

"Connie," said the Saint gently, holding her eyes, "is there any other reason why you think Steve won't win? Something you haven't told me yet?"

[*Turn page*]

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

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Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. *(Adv.)*

She drew back.

"No." She turned away. "I've told you everything. I—Spangler used to be a doctor once," she said quickly. "I mean a real doctor. I—suppose he uses hypnotism? I know how crazy that sounds, but something will happen to Steve! I know it will!"

NONE of this was particularly fresh grist for Simon's cogitative mill. He sighed.

"If Steve gives his usual performance," he reasoned, "I don't see that Bilinski stands a prayer. As for Doc Spangler's hypnotic powers, I wouldn't worry too much about them."

Connie's mouth trembled.

"I'm sorry. I might have known that you'd talk just as Steve does—you and that trainer of his."

Simon's brows lifted.

"Trainer?"

"Whitey Mullins."

Hoppy, reaching for the coffee pot, turned eagerly.

"Ya mean Whitey's trainin' de Champ? Say!" He beamed with the fanged grimace of a delighted dinosaur. "Whitey's a great guy!"

The green eyes flashed at him.

"Is he? What does Mullins care what happens to Steve? All *he* cares about is getting even with Spangler. He's just using Steve for a catspaw!"

Hoppy blinked, his mouth open.

"I didn't know de Champ's a southpaw, but everybody knows Whitey has it in for de Doc ever since Spangler finagles Bilinski's contract away from him. Dat's an old story." He shook his head dazedly. "And all de time I t'ink Nelson is a right-hander! He fights like one."

Pat suppressed a smile.

"There doesn't seem to be much wrong with having a handler who's so interested in seeing the Angel beaten."

"But the Angel won't be beaten," Connie said hopelessly. "Steve'll be killed! He hasn't a chance!"

Simon studied her broodingly.

"You're very sure of that," he said and reached into his pocket to bring something out. He went on without a change of tone, "Did you ever see this before?"

On the table between them he laid the revolver which last night's visitor had left behind.

By no perceptible sign, the Saint sensed a sudden change in her, an inner freezing, her eyes coming into focus on the gun, her whole being gripped by an odd stillness almost bordering on sheer panic.

"Where," she said, in a small tight voice, "did you get that?"

"It was left here last night as a sort of calling card."

Patricia was staring at him.

"Last night?"

"Some hopped-up heister crashes de joint," Hoppy snorted. "He gets away before we can even see who it is. But we give him such a scare he forgets de rod."

"You didn't tell me!" Pat accused. "You finished that brawl at the Arena over here, didn't you?" She searched Simon's face narrowly, and sensed the truth with the swift certainty of an intuition ground to psychic fineness by the countless abrasions of past experience. "Some one followed you here and tried to kill you!"

THE Saint bowed.

"Darling, you know our kind of friends too well."

Connie Grady rose suddenly. She gathered up her purse and gloves with unsteady hands. Her face was pale, the magnolia skin drawn and haggard. She tried to ignore the revolver on the table, but her eyes kept flitting back to it as if under the spell of some kind of frightening fascination.

"I'm sorry I bothered you like this," she said with nervous breathlessness. "It was silly, really. I—" She broke off, walking quickly to the door. "Goodby."

"No, wait!"

"Please."

She almost ran out of the apartment, and the front door slammed noisily behind her.

CHAPTER IX

PATRICIA and Hoppy returned their blank stares to the Saint—Patricia's tinged with irony.

"Too bad," she said. "And you were just starting to make such an impression."

"Chees," Hoppy said between mouthfuls, resuming his assault on the food, "de Torpedo gettin' killed last night kinda made her blow her top, huh, boss?"

"It was the gun that upset her," Pat stated. "Why?"

Simon picked up the revolver and turned it idly in his hands.

"My crystal ball doesn't work like yours," he said, and he smiled at her. "Rather an attractive little thing, isn't she?"

"Oh, rather," Pat agreed, her smile sweetly corrosive, "if you like them on the slightly hysterical side."

Simon laughed, his fingernail tracing the small intertwined letters engraved on the metal just above the stocks of the gun.

"Poor Melusina," he sighed whimsically. "I'm afraid her dear old daddy is making her cry."

"Melusina? What are you talking about? I thought her name was Connie."

"So it is. The term was merely analogous. Melusina was a fairy. A French fairy." Simon grinned provocatively. "If you ever delved into such matters in your youth, dear, you'll remember the story."

"I never was as good at fairy tales as you," Pat said demurely.

"Melusina," Simon continued imperturbably, "was no end attractive and quite easy to take—even if she was on the slightly hysterical side. However, she happened to suffer an injury from her father, for which, if memory serves, she had him imprisoned inside a mountain. She, in turn, was punished by being turned into a snake from the waist down every Saturday night."

"She ought to have been able to wriggle out of that one," Patricia said dryly. "But what has it got to do with Miss Grady, if anything?"

"Boss, don't she t'ink Smith got killed by accident?" Hoppy demanded.

"Inasmuch as you raise the question," Simon said, "I'll give the answer. No."

"Obviously," said Patricia. "But what do *you* think?"

"She's quite right. It wasn't an accident."

Mr. Uniatz absorbed half a cup of coffee at a gulp, scowling interestedly.

"Ya mean de Torpedo ain't knocked off fair and square?"

The Saint nodded thoughtfully.

"Indubitably not—if instinct serves, and I think it does. At any rate, we're going to look into the matter."

"What are you going to do, Simon?"

The Saint smiled at her and then at the gun lying on the palm of his hand.

"We're going to call on the man who owns this," he said. "Wish we could take you along, but unfortunately . . ."

"But you said you didn't even see who it was who left that gun here!" she exclaimed. "How do you know who—?"

"I know who owns these initials," said the Saint patiently, lifting the gun for her inspection. He showed her the monogram in fancy script on the metal. "They're rather difficult to untangle, but I think you can make them out."

Hoppy leaned over.

"Initials?" he queried, peering at the gun. "Where?"

"M . . . G." Pat read. "M-G? But who is M-G?"

"Offhand I'd say it was Connie's father, Michael Grady, wouldn't you?" Simon kissed her, and stood up. "Let's get started, Hoppy. We may be able to dig her old man out of the mountain."

* * *

The Saint entered by one of the side entrances of the Manhattan Arena and found himself, as he expected, in the office wing of the building. The corridors and reception rooms were alive

with voices and sporting gentry of varied interests and importance; for this was a crossroads of the indoor sporting world, and through these catacombs paraded its foremost and hindmost representatives.

Simon moved silently along the shadowed wall of the main hall and stepped into the main reception room.

It was a bare and unkempt antechamber, its hard chairs and benches occupied by a garrulous covey of promoters, managers, sports writers, ticket speculators, and professional athletes of varied talents and notoriety, all obviously waiting to see the great Mike Grady.

A FOG of tobacco smoke hung over the room like stale incense burnt to strange and violent gods; the voices of the votaries droned a ragged litany punctuated by coarse yaks of laughter.

There was something about them that marked them as a distinct species of metropolitan life. Each was subtly akin to the other, no matter how different their outer hides might be. It lay, perhaps, in the mutual boldness of their eyes, the uninhibited expression of primitive emotion and in the corner-of-the-mouth asides.

Their eyes appraised the Saint pitilessly as he threaded his way through them, like circus animals taking the measure of a new trainer. But in the same moment their inquisitorial glances flipped away again, as if even under his easy elegance they recognized instinctively a fellow member of their own predatory species.

The girl at the switchboard near Grady's office door, who doubled as receptionist, surveyed the Saint in the same way as he approached her. But even her dead-pan appraisal softened responsively to the intimate flattery of his smile. He was opening the door of Grady's private office before she suddenly remembered her duties as sentry of the sanctum.

"Hey, come back here!" she cried. "You can't go in there!"

Like other women who had tried to tell the Saint what he couldn't do, she thought of her objections a little late. The Saint was already in.

Michael Grady was sitting tilted back in his swivel chair, his feet resting on the edge of his huge desk, his broad snub-nosed face turned upward at the ceiling as he cuddled a telephone in the crook of his jaw and shoulder. His gaze swung doorward as he heard the door close and his eyes, which matched the Saint's for blueness, bulged with embryonic eruption.

The Saint waved a debonair greeting and sank into a worn leather club chair facing him.

The promoter grunted a couple of times into the telephone, his eyes fixed on Simon Templar's, and hung up, his feet returning to the floor with a crash.

"And who might you be?" he blasted.

A rich brogue was still ingrained in Grady's gravelly tenor although, as the Saint well knew, it had been thirty years since he had left his native Ireland.

The ups and downs of Mike Grady's turbulent career to his present eminence as promoter of the Manhattan Arena was a familiar story to the city's sporting gentry. It was a career which, on the whole, had won Grady more friends than enemies—and those enemies the kind an honest but headstrong man easily makes on his way to the top.

"The name," Simon announced, "is Simon Templar."

Grady stared at him, digesting the name, seeking a familiar niche for it, his brows drawn together in a guarded frown. He opened his mouth as if to speak, then closed it again as recognition dawned in his eyes. He leaned forward on his desk.

"The Saint?" he asked unbelievingly, and sprang to his feet without waiting for a reply. "Of course! I should have known!" He came from behind the desk, extending an eager hand. "Glad to meet you, Saint!"

Simon rose to his feet and allowed his arm to be used like a pump handle.

"And it's a shame you've not visited me before," Grady enthused. "Why,

only yesterday one of the boys brings up your name as a possibility for master of ceremonies for the Summer Ice Follies we're puttin' on soon. The Saint and Sonja Henie! Can't you just see that billin'! It'd be sensational! You'd pack 'em in! We'd have it in all the papers—on billboards—on the radio—"

"And in sky writing," added the Saint. "Well, I suppose the world will always beat a path to the door of the man who builds a better claptrap, but I didn't come as a performer in that line. I already have a—sort of profession, you know."

"A profession? You?" Grady smiled jestingly. "And what would that be?"

"I'm what you might call a haunter," said the Saint.

Grady's brows knitted.

"A haunter?"

"Of guilty consciences."

"That," said Mr. Grady after a pause, "I don't get."

Simon helped himself to a cigarette from the dispenser on the desk.

"Well," he said engagingly, "take your conscience, for example."

Grady grinned at him.

"And why would you be hantin' *my* conscience? It's crystal clear."

Simon struck a match.

"Is it?"

"Indeed, it is."

"Even about your secret partnership with Doc Spangler?"

CHAPTER X

GRADY'S grin faded. He turned abruptly, went behind his desk and sat down. His fingertips tapped a nervous tattoo on the top of his desk for a moment.

"Even if that were true," he said finally, "would it be a crime?"

The Saint also sat down again, lowering himself through a leisured breath of smoke.

"I always heard you were an honest man, Mike," he said quietly. "Spangler's a crook and you know it."

Grady flushed.

"I don't know anything of the sort!" he snapped. "So he served time once. What of it? A man can make a mistake."

"I know," Simon nodded. "And you put him back on his feet, gave him a job at the Queensbury Gym."

"The best masseur I ever had!"

"Very likely. He was a doctor before they took away his license for peddling dope." Simon consulted his cigarette ash. "Mike, you even advanced him money to go into business as a fight manager, didn't you?"

Grady stirred impatiently.

"Well, what of it?" he demanded. "When I got this job here at the Arena I gave up the gym. Doc didn't want to work there without me, so I loaned him a couple of grand."

"For which he gave you a share in Barrel House Bilinski as collateral."

"Well—" Grady chuckled, but his humor was punctuated with unease. "It didn't seem like much collateral at the time. He wasn't the Masked Angel then, you know."

"I know."

"Well, then," Grady said, spreading his square freckled hands expressively, "you know how good Spangler is. A great fighter he's made out of a broken-down stumble-bum."

The Saint shook his head sadly.

"Mike," he protested, "anyone, a child—even Connie, your own daughter—might be skeptical of that. In fact, if she knew about your partnership with Spangler, she might even be afraid that you're mixed up in something not quite on the level."

Grady stiffened, his face reddening.

"And what has my daughter to do with this?"

The Saint's disclaimer was as bland as cold cream.

"Why nothing at all, Mike. I merely mentioned her as a possibility."

"Well, you just leave her out of this!" Grady glared at him and then looked away restlessly. "Maybe it isn't according to Hoyle for me to have a finan-

cial interest in Bilinski," he grumbled, "but it doesn't matter to me if he wins or loses, just so I get my two grand back."

"By the way," said the Saint, "how does Spangler get away with Bilinski wearing that old sock over his head?"

"He has special permission from the Boxin' Commission," Grady replied curtly. "It's a legitimate publicity stunt."

"If there is such a thing," Simon admitted, "but it certainly improves his appearance."

"He'll have to take it off for the Championship fight," Grady informed him sourly, "when he gives Steve Nelson the beatin' he deserves!"

The Saint's keen eyes drooped with offensive restraint.

"You seem to lack a certain enthusiasm for your future son-in-law," he observed.

"Not *my* son-in-law!" roared the promoter. "No common knuckle-head boxfighter is going to marry the daughter of Mike Grady, I can tell you. I don't know what tales you been hearing, but she's not marrying that punk, you can depend on it!"

"What are you going to do—forbid the banns?"

"I'll not see her tied to a leather mauler with no more future than a cake of ice," Grady said belligerently. "I've seen what happens to the most of 'em after their fightin' days are done, with their brains addled and the eyes knocked out of 'em, no money saved and their wives drudges!"

The Saint built an "O" with a smoke-ring.

"So that's why you quarreled."

"I wouldn't call it a quarrel." The promoter's eyes glittered. "I told him just what I've told you, and I told him to let Connie alone."

"But if Steve is retiring after his fight with the Angel, as he says—"

"Sure! That's what he says," Grady snorted. "How many times have I heard *that* one before! So he's retiring. On what?"

Simon shrugged.

"On the purse, I suppose. Unless, of course, he gets killed before he can collect it. The way Smith was."

Mike Grady put his elbows on the desk and cupped his forehead in his hands, staring down at his desk.

"That was a terrible thing to happen," he said somberly. "But it was an accident." He looked up defiantly. "It wouldn't happen once in a million fights."

The Saint gazed at him thoughtfully. A pattern seemed to be unfolding. So Grady wanted no part of Connie's fiancé. He was in semi-partnership with Doc Spangler. But did he disapprove of Nelson enough to arrange his death? Was he of the same stripe as Spangler? Somehow the Saint couldn't quite accept that.

Grady was not wanting in the essential elements of humanity. A hot-headed, obstinate old blowhard, perhaps, but not a wicked man. Shrewd, conniving, scheming maybe, but not a crook. Somewhere the thorn of conscience pricked. Somewhere beneath the flinty carapace was a sentimental heart. An expert in such things, the Saint felt certain of his diagnosis. And yet. . . .

"Perhaps," said the Saint. "But I collect those one-in-a-million chances." He slipped the snub-barreled revolver out of his pocket and laid it almost casually on Grady's desk. "No doubt it was also one chance in a million that I found this in my apartment last night."

Grady stared at the gun in open-mouthed amazement.

"Where the hell did you get that?" he demanded stupidly.

"It's yours, of course?"

"Sure it's mine. My initials are on it! Where'd you get it?"

"I told you. In my apartment last night. After my little interview with Spangler last night, some character broke into my little ivory tower with the apparent idea of air-conditioning me with your heater. Unfortunately Hoppy Uniatz and myself had just booby-trapped the door in preparation for a visit from the tax collector. This

other character didn't have a sense of humor, so he went away in a sort of huff."

Grady thrust himself from his chair and walked to the window. He stared out blindly, his hands folded across his chest, his face a thundercloud.

"I don't understand," he muttered. "Unless he sold it, or—" He turned to Simon abruptly. "That gun was stolen from me," he said flatly, "by Steve Nelson!"

The Saint tapped the ash from his cigarette dispassionately.

"Stolen?" he murmured.

"Yes, stolen!" Grady returned to his chair. "Last week. Right in this office. He took the gun and I've never seen it since—that is, until this moment."

"How do you know he took it?" the Saint asked.

"How do I know he took it!" Grady bawled. "The punk nearly broke my arm!"

"Oh," Simon deduced innocently. "This, I take it, was during the quarrel you didn't have."

Grady glowered at the gun on the desk.

"If it wasn't a matter of business and money out of my pocket, I'd have him thrown in jail for so long—"

"That Connie wouldn't even know him when he did come out?"

"Skip it."

"You pulled that gun on him, didn't you? And he took it away from you. Was that it?"

Grady's high blood pressure became painfully evident.

"I said skip it!" he shouted. "I was defending myself—not that I couldn't handle him with me bare hands if I had to!"

Simon rose to his feet and retrieved the gun.

"You won't mind if I borrow this until I trace the character who tried to use it on me last night?"

"Help yourself," Grady grunted darkly. "Do you have any idea who it was?"

"Do you think Steve Nelson could answer that question?"

Grady scowled and shook his head.

"It doesn't sound like him—sneakin' into a man's house . . . No, it couldn't have been! The punk must have sold it or lost it. Whoever got it from Nelson is the man you'll be wantin'."

The Saint stood up.

"That's whom I'm going to find," he said. "I'll see you again, Mike."

Before the promoter realized that the interview was over, Simon had opened the door and sauntered out.

There was a sudden dampening of volume in the conversation about the Saint as he emerged from Grady's office. Whereas he had attracted little attention on entering the reception room, his effrontery in crashing Grady's office ahead of everyone else now made him a marked man, the target of a concentrated battery of indignant eyes.

But the Saint seemed wholly unaware of the hushed hostility as he paused by the girl at the switchboard and watched her plug in a connection.

"Yes, Mr. Grady," she said. And after a moment: "Doctor who? . . . Yes, sir, I'll get him for you right away."

She reached for the telephone directory on a shelf beside her.

"Crescent three—one, four, six, five," the Saint prompted helpfully.

She looked up like a startled gopher and Simon Templar gave her the same friendly smile with which he had short-circuited her before.

"It was Dr. Otto Spangler you wanted, wasn't it?" he said, and strolled out before she could find her voice.

Hoppy Uniatz had the engine of the convertible racing as Simon opened the door, and he scarcely gave the Saint time to sit down before he banged in the clutch and sent the car roaring up the street and lurching around the first corner against the lights.

"What are you trying to do?" Simon asked. "Pick up a ticket?"

"Don't worry, boss," Hoppy said. "De getaway is a cinch. I drove lotsa dese jobs before. Didja blast him good?"

Simon considered him.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Dat bum, Grady! Ya just give him de business, dontcha?"

The Saint shook his head patiently.

"No, Hoppy, no. I never said that our visitor last night was Mike Grady. Let's head for Riverside Drive. I want to talk to Steve Nelson in person."

CHAPTER XI

THE blue convertible swept up Riverside Drive through the sixties, past the seventies, with the sun-drenched wind whispering through Simon Templar's crisp black hair. It was a clean, brisk wind cooled by the mile-wide ribbon of the Hudson which ran parallel on their left, its shining water stippled in a million breaking facets that caught the bright sunlight in broad mosaics of burnished gold.

All in all, the Saint thought, it was much too gay and lovely a day for exploring spiritual sewers, or delving into the fetid labyrinths of murder. They were in the eighties before the Saint signalled Hoppy to slow down.

"It's that house at the end of the block," he said.

The big car swooped to the curb and drew to a halt before one of the three-storied brownstone buildings which stand along Riverside Drive like autumnal spinsters, their old-fashioned elegance reminiscent of a more sedate and happier era.

"De champ live here?" Hoppy asked with some wonder.

"It says so in the directory."

"Wit' his dough, I'd be livin' on Park Avenue."

"That's why you wouldn't have his dough for long." Simon got out of the car. "Wait for me, Hoppy. I won't be long."

A glance at the letter-boxes revealed that Steve Nelson had an apartment on the second floor. Simon opened the door and went to the foot of the thickly carpeted stairway.

The gloom inside was stygian by contrast with the brightness of the street, but he was able to make out the doorway of Steve Nelson's apartment at the head of the stairs. From the same direction came the sound of male voices raised in argument.

Simon gripped the ornately carved bannister and bounded upward lightly and with absolute silence. Before he reached the top, however, the voices suddenly rose to shouting violence. A girl screamed, then the door flew open with a crash. A bull-necked citizen staggered backward out of the door, followed by a taller quick-moving younger man who gripped him by the shoulder, spun him around with a jerk, and sent him toppling down the stairs with a savage kick.

If the Saint hadn't been in the way, the victim would have continued to the bottom without more than two bounces. But, as it happened, Simon caught the impact of the man's weight on one arm and shoulder, lifted him to his feet, and had a good look at his face.

"Why, Karl!" Simon greeted him affably, keeping a firm grip on the dazed thug's lapel, "how you do get around."

Recognition and fear flared simultaneously in the gunman's eyes. With a sudden turn he jerked free, leaped the rest of the way down the stairs and disappeared out of the door, leaving his coat in the Saint's hands.

"The Saint!" Connie Grady gasped.

There was a pale thread of repressed panic in her startled voice. She was standing in the doorway of Steve Nelson's apartment, staring down at Simon over one of Steve Nelson's broad shoulders.

The Saint went on up the stairs, Karl's coat draped over his arm.

"Your playmate must have been in a hurry," he murmured.

Nelson, blond and slim-waisted, gazed in mild bafflement at the Saint. He turned to Connie.

"It's the Saint," she said. "Simon Templar. I told you I met him yesterday . . . my fiancé, Steve Nelson," she introduced them.

As Nelson turned to take Simon's hand, the Saint caught a glimpse of Connie's eyes over his shoulder, strained and pleading. So she was afraid he'd spill the beans about her visit to his apartment that morning.

"I'm afraid you came at rather a difficult moment," she was saying with a nervous laugh.

"If that character ever comes back again," Steve Nelson said deliberately, "he'll lose more than just a coat." He grinned. "Glad to know you, Saint. I've sure heard a lot about you. Won't you come in?"

Steve Nelson's apartment inside was considerably more attractive than the conservative exterior of the building seemed to indicate. Simon looked about him approvingly.

"Do sit down, won't you?" Connie invited, and he could feel her nervousness like a secret between them.

The Saint sat down, stretching his long legs luxuriously as he fished for his cigarettes.

Nelson dropped into a chair across the table and pushed a little wooden donkey toward him. He pumped its tail and a cigarette flopped out of its mouth into the Saint's lap.

Simon retrieved it admiringly.

"Quite a gadget," he remarked easily. "Too bad you haven't got one that tosses out undesirable guests with equal facility."

"That's one thing I'd rather do by hand," Nelson said. "You know him, eh?"

The Saint's shoulders lifted slightly. "Karl? We've met." He glanced at Connie. She was still standing, watching him tensely. "One of Doc Spangler's favorite thugs." He struck a light and lit his cigarette, aware of Nelson's silent curiosity about his visit.

"Unfortunately," he commented, "Karl's mind has too much specific gravity—which is only natural, perhaps, when you consider that there's more solid ivory on top of it, than even my friend Hoppy Uniatz can boast."

"Who?" Nelson asked wonderingly.

They all turned to the door as a sudden storm of giant footfalls came pounding up the stairs.

"That would be him now," Simon announced calmly.

"Boss!" Hoppy's laryngismal bellow shook the panels of the door almost as forcefully as the crash of his fist. "Boss, you all right? Boss!"

The Saint sprang to his feet, but Connie was already opening the door.

Hoppy surged in, looking around alertly. He spotted Simon with a gusty sigh of relief.

"Hoppy," Connie cried in alarm. "What's the matter?"

"Chees!" wheezed Mr. Uniatz. "I see dat monkey Karl comin' out after you go in, an' when you don't come out after him—"

"You really thought that brainless ape had taken me? You didn't stop him to find out?"

MR. UNIATZ floundered with embarrassment.

"Well, I chase him, boss, but he dives into somebody's basement on West End Avenoo, an' I'm kinda worried about what goes wit' youse, so I come back to find out."

The Saint handed him Karl's coat.

"He was just streamlining his wardrobe. You can have it. It's about your size and certainly your style."

He turned to Nelson. "This is Hoppy Uniatz. Hoppy, meet the Champ, Steve Nelson."

Hoppy thrust out a hamlike paw as he grabbed the coat with the other.

"Likewise, I'm sure," he beamed.

"This your sparring partner?" Nelson asked, looking Hoppy up and down with respect.

"Not Hoppy," said the Saint regretfully. "He never learned the Queensbury rules. When Hoppy fights, he uses everything he has—including his head, elbows, knees and feet. That is, when he can't use brass knuckles, a beer bottle or a blackjack."

"Well, yeah," Hoppy admitted, "a sap makes t'ings easier, but ya can't handle it wit' dem big gloves on."

"I guess not," Nelson said politely.

"But I'll sure be glad to spar wit' youse, just de same," Hoppy said. "I myself can knock dis Masked Angel kickin' and so can you."

"That's what the Angel's manager seems to be afraid of," Nelson said. He turned to Simon. "He sent that bum I threw out to proposition me."

The Saint regarded him steadily.

"Tell me more."

"Spangler's offering him the Angel's share of the purse!" Connie broke in, a note of hysteria in her voice. "Steve'll get the whole purse if he—if he—"

She was trembling.

"Take it easy, baby," Nelson soothed, putting an arm around her shoulders. He looked at Simon. "I get the Angel's cut of the purse if I throw the fight. That's the proposition." He showed his teeth humorlessly. "The Boxing Commission will get a kick out of it when I tell them."

Simon shook his head.

"I'm afraid Spangler will only deny it."

"But Connie's a witness!"

"Of course. But Karl was drunk. He didn't know what he was doing or saying. And he was kidding anyway. Karl's a great little kidder. At least, that's what Spangler will say, and Karl will agree with him absolutely.

"Spangler may even fire him—in public anyway—for being a bad boy." The Saint shrugged. "I wouldn't bother about reporting it to the Commission if I were you, Steve. Just go ahead and flatten the Angel. Tell the Commission afterwards."

"No!" Connie cried. "Steve ought to report it first. Spangler shouldn't be allowed to get away with it. He's a crooked manager and it's going to be a crooked fight!"

"I can take care of myself," Nelson said irritably. "The fight's going on, baby, come hell or high water. And I'm not going to get hurt. After all the good men I've fought you have to worry about a stumblebum like the Angel!"

"Lookit, Champ," Hoppy said proudly. "I got a idea."

"What?"

"Whynacha tell de Doc you'll take his proposition—cash in advance. Get de dough an' den knock de fat slob for a homer. What's wrong wit' dat?"

"I'm afraid it would offer undesirable complications," Simon vetoed amiably. "There are enough complications to straighten out as it is." He pulled Mike Grady's gun from his pocket. "This, for instance," he said, and handed it, butt first, to Steve Nelson.

FOR an interval of two seconds a startled stillness froze the room. Then Nelson put out his hand slowly and took the weapon. He glanced at it, looked at the Saint a moment, then turned to meet Connie's wide stare. Her eyes were dark with apprehension.

The narrow margin of Mr. Uniatz's brow knotted in puzzlement.

"Boss," he said hoarsely, "you don't mean it was *him?*"

The Champion's eyes flashed to the Saint.

"What's this about?" he clipped. "Where'd you get this?"

"From some character who paid us a call last night. We've been trying to find out who he was and return it to him, in case he feels undressed without it. Mike Grady admits the gun is his, but he claims you stole it from him."

"That's ridiculous!" Connie jumped up, her eyes flashing. "Daddy was—he wasn't himself!" Sudden tears spilled down the curve of her cheeks. She continued with difficulty, "He'd been drinking too much. Steve had to take the gun away from him."

She flung herself on the sofa and buried her face in her hands. Steve Nelson put his arm about her shoulders.

"That's okay, baby," he comforted.

Hoppy stirred uneasily, but the Saint accepted the emotional demonstration and Nelson's uncertain glare with Indian equanimity. He was completely impersonal, completely unconfused.

He lighted another cigarette, and exhaled with judicious patience.

"All I'm interested in," he said, "is how that gun happened to find its way into my apartment last night."

CHAPTER XII

NELSON seemed uncertain whether to explain or fight.

"Sure, I—I took the gun away from Grady, but how it got into the hands of a burglar I don't know. I gave it to Connie to return to her father." He glanced at the girl. "You did give it to him, didn't you, honey?"

She sat up, drying the teary dampness from her nose, and shook her head in silent negation.

Nelson stared at her.

"You didn't?"

She stuffed the handkerchief away.

"I didn't want him to have it!" she said vehemently. "He wasn't safe with it after what he did to you."

"But—"

"I gave it to Whitey and told him to drop it in the river!"

"I know Whitey," said Mr. Uniatz. "He's a good trainer, Champ."

"He's my manager now," Nelson said.

Simon stroked the ashtray with the end of his cigarette.

"Since when?" he inquired.

"We signed the papers yesterday." Nelson turned back to Connie. "Whitey never said anything about your giving him the gun."

"Why should he? I just told him to get rid of it and not say anything to anybody."

"Whitey's okay," Mr. Uniatz insisted, to make his point absolutely clear. "He can do ya a lotta good."

"Sure," Nelson asserted moodily, "and he's honest—which is a darn sight more than you can say for most of 'em—not that your dad isn't honest, honey," he amended quickly. "We never quarreled over that."

The Saint drew his trimmed cigarette-end to a fresh glow.

"It sounds—cozy," he murmured. "But I'd still like very much to find out what brother Mullins did with that gun after he got it."

The girl said, "I don't know . . . I don't know."

Footfalls sounded on the stairway outside and the doorbell rang.

"That's probably him now," Nelson said. "He's going to the gym with me."

He opened the door and Whitey Mullins stepped in, as advertised.

"Hiya, Champ," he greeted, and stopped short as he caught sight of Hoppy heaving to his feet.

"Whitey!" Mr. Uniatz welcomed, surging forward and flinging a crane-like arm about Whitey's shoulders in leviathan camaraderie.

Mullins staggered beneath the shock of its weight. His derby slipped over his forehead and he pushed it back crossly.

"Easy, you big ape!" he snarled.

"We just hear you are de Champ's new manager," Hoppy bellowed happily.

"This is the Saint," Steve Nelson introduced. "You've heard of him."

Whitey Mullins' pale eyes widened a trifle before his mouth formed a tight smile.

"You bet I have."

He thrust out a narrow hand. "I seen you at the fights last night, didn't I?"

The Saint nodded, shaking the hand.

"I was there."

"Sure you seen us," Hoppy said. "You're de foist one tells us de Torpedo is croaked, remember?"

"I never wanna have nuttin' like that happen to me again," Mullins said grimly. "It's awful. I still can't figure how it coulda happened. The Torpedo was in great condition. The poor guy musta had a weak ticker or sump'n." He turned to Simon, a faint gleam coming alive in his pale eyes. "I heard you raised a stink with that rat Spangler after the fight."

The Saint launched a smoke ring in the direction of the gun lying on the table and smiled dreamily.

"The stench you mention," he said, "was already there. Hoppy and I merely went to investigate its source."

"Yeah," Hoppy corroborated. "De Angel smells out loud! Why, dat bum can't fight."

"How can you say that," Connie objected tensely, "when he's just killed a man in the ring?"

"That was an accident," Mullins waved away her fears with an impatient gesture of one thin hairy hand. "That crook Spangler will be eatin' off'n his social security when we get through with him, huh, Champ? You'll murder that big beef he stole from me!"

His hatchet face was venomous, as though distorted by an inward vision of vengeance.

"Whitey," Connie said, "what did you do with that gun?"

Whitey's rapt stare came back to earth and jerked in her direction.

"Gun?" he said blankly, and followed her glance to the table. "Oh, *that.*"

He looked quickly at Steve, at Simon and Hoppy, and back to Connie again.

"Yes, that," she said. "I told you to get rid of it."

"I did," Whitey said. "How did it get here?"

HOPPY grunted, "Some heister crashes de Saint's flat last night. He leaves de rod."

"Yeah? Who was it?"

"That," said the Saint amiably, "is what I'd like to know. If you got rid of this gun, what did you do with it?"

Mullins snapped his fingers as if smitten by recollection.

"I almost forgot! He reached into his coat, extracted a wallet and selected a ten and a five. He offered the two bills to Connie. "Here. It's your dough."

"Mine?" She didn't touch the money. "Why?"

"It's the dough I got fer it at th' hock shop," he explained. "Ten bucks on the rod—five bucks for the pawn ducat I sell for chips in a poker session the other night."

She shook her head quickly.

"No. You keep it. For your trouble."

Whitey unhesitatingly replaced the money in his wallet.

"Okay, if you say so."

"Who did you sell the ticket to?" Simon inquired casually.

"Mushky Thompson," Whitey said. "But it goes through his kick like a dose of salts. Pretty soon it's movin' from one pot to another like cash."

"Yes, but who got it in the end?" Nelson asked.

"I quit at three in th' morning. Who it winds up with, I couldn't say." Whitey glanced at his wrist watch. " 'Bout time we was headin' for the gym, Stevie."

"Was Karl sitting in on the game?" Simon persisted.

Whitey blinked.

"I don't think so."

"That's an expensive gun, Whitey," Simon pursued mildly. "Is ten all you could get on it?"

Mullins spread his hands expressively.

"No papers, no license. Ten bucks and no questions asked is pretty good these days."

"I haven't been following the market lately," Simon confessed. "Where did you hock it?"

The trainer lifted his derby and thoughtfully massaged the bald spot in his straw-colored hair with two fingers of the same hand.

"It's a place off Sixth Avenue, as I recall," he said finally, dropping his chapeau back on its accustomed perch. "Near forty-fourth. The Polar Bear Trading and Loan Company."

The Saint picked up the gun again.

"Thanks. I may need this a bit longer —if nobody minds." He slipped it into his pocket and glanced at Nelson. He said inconsequentially, "I wouldn't do any boxing until that hand heals, Steve."

Whitey's eyes flashed to the hand Steve Nelson had been carrying palm upwards to conceal the raw gash along its back. He swore softly as he examined it.

"It's just a scratch," Nelson scoffed. "I was going to take care of it before we left."

"The next time our friend Karl visits you," Simon advised him, "don't give him a chance to touch you. That finger jewelry he wears is more dangerous than brass knuckles."

"Karl!" Whitey turned with outraged

incredulity. "He was here?"

"He had a little proposition," Nelson said. "Wanted me to throw the fight for both ends of the gate."

"The weasel!" Mullins exploded. "I mighta known Spangler'd try sump'n like that. He knows that ham of his ain't got a chance."

Simon crushed out his cigarette in the ashtray.

"I'd feel even more sure of that if I could drop in and watch you train, Steve," he said. "In fact, I'd rather like to work out with you myself."

"Any time," Nelson said.

"Tomorrow morning," said the Saint. "Come on, Hoppy, let's keep on the trail of the roving roscoe."

CHAPTER XIII

THE only connection that the Polar Bear Trading and Loan Company might possibly have had with the animal for which it was named, Simon decided as he entered the premises, was the arctic quality of its proprietor's stare.

This personality, however, was a far cry from the conventional bearded, skull-capped shylock that was once practically a cliché in the public mind. He was, in fact, a pale smooth-shaven young man with curly black hair, elegantly attired in a sports jacket and striped flannels. He barely lifted a brow in recognition as he caught sight of Hoppy on Simon's heels.

"Hi, Ruby," Hoppy said. "I have a idea I remember dis jernt from 'way back. Long time no see, huh?"

To the Saint's unsentimental blue eyes, Ruby slipped into a familiar niche like a nickel into a slot. Just as a jungle dweller knows at a glance the vulture from the eagle, so the Saint knew that in the stone jungles of the city this specimen was of a scavenger breed—with a touch of reptile, perhaps. And the fact that Mr. Uniatz knew the place of old was almost enough to confirm the discredit of its agate-eyed proprietor.

Ruby flinched instinctively as Mike Grady's revolver appeared in the Saint's fist, held for an instant with its muzzle pointed at the pawn-broker's midriff, before Simon laid it on the counter.

"This gun," said the Saint, "was pawned here a few days ago, remember?"

The pawnbroker studied it a moment. His delicately curved brows lifted slightly.

"I see lots of guns," he said tonelessly. "Every day."

He looked at Simon with eyes that had the blank unfocussed quality of the blind.

"Whitey Mullins hocks it," Hoppy amplified. "Ya know Whitey."

"However, he didn't claim it himself," Simon went on. "Someone else did a few days ago. I want to know who."

"Who are you?" Ruby asked in his flat monotone. "What gives?"

Hoppy grabbed his shoulder in a bone-crushing clutch and, with his other hand, pointed a calloused digit directly under Simon's nose.

"Dis," he explained unmistakably, "is de Saint. When de boss asks ya a question, ya don't talk back."

Ruby shook off Hoppy's paw and flicked imaginary contamination from his jacket. He looked back to the Saint.

"So?" he said.

"This gun," Simon continued pleasantly, "was redeemed. Who turned in the ticket? I promise there's no trouble in it for you."

The young man across the counter sighed and stared moodily at the gun.

"Okay, so you give me a promise. Can my wife cash it at the bank if I get knocked off for talkin' too much?"

"No," Simon conceded. "But your chances of living to a ripe and fruitless old age are far better, believe me, if you do give me the information I want."

The pawnbroker's eyes slid over him with stony opacity.

It began to dawn upon Mr. Uniatz that his old pal was being very slow to coöperate. His reaction to that realization was a darkening scowl of disap-

proval. Backgrounded by the peculiar advantages of Hoppy's normal face, this expression conveyed a warning about as subtle as the first smoke rising from an active volcano. Ruby caught a glimpse of it and whatever cogitation was going on behind the curtain of his face reached an immediate conclusion.

"Why ask me?" he complained wearily. "I don't ask his monicker. I ain't interested. He's a tall skinny jerk with a face like a horse. He bought a set of throwing knives from me once. That's all I know."

The Sain't perspective roamed through a corridor of memory that Ruby's description had faintly illuminated. A nebulous image formed somewhere in the vista, and tried to coalesce within recognizable outlines; but for the moment the shape still eluded him.

"Give you ten on the rod," Ruby offered disinterestedly.

Simon picked up the revolver and slipped it back into his pocket.

"I'm afraid it isn't mine," he said truthfully.

A sardonic glimmer flickered in the young pawnbroker's eyes for an instant.

"You don't say."

"As a matter of fact, it belongs to George Murphy, whose initials are M. G., spelled backwards," Simon informed him solemnly, and sauntered from the shop with Hoppy in his wake.

It was perhaps the way the black sedan roared away from the curb at the end of the block that pressed an alarm button in the Saint's reflexes. It forced itself into the stream of traffic with a suddenness that compelled the drivers behind to give way with screaming brakes.

For one vivid instant, as if by the split-second illumination of a flash of lightning, Simon saw the driver, alone in the front seat, hunched over the wheel, his hat pulled low over his eyes, his face hidden in the shadow of the brim, a glimpse of stubbled jowl barely visible. He had an impression of two others crouched in the deeper shadow of the back seat, their faces obscured by handkerchiefs, the vague angle of their upraised arms pointing towards him. . . .

ALL this the Saint saw, absorbed, analyzed, and acted upon in the fragment of time before he kicked Hoppy's feet from under him so that they both dropped to the sidewalk together as the black sedan raced by, sending a fusillade of bullets cracking over them into the pawn shop window beyond.

Hoppy Uniatz, prone on his stomach, dragged out his gun and fired a single shot just as the gunmen's car cut in ahead of a truck and beat a red light.

"Hold it!" Simon ordered. "You're more likely to hurt the wrong people."

They scrambled to their feet and dusted off their clothes.

"You okay, boss?" Hoppy asked anxiously.

"Just a bit chilled from the draft of those bullets going by."

Hoppy glared toward the street corner where their assailants had vanished.

"De doity punks," he rumbled. "Who wuz it, boss?"

The Saint had no answer. But if he had had, it would have been interrupted by the yelp of the curly-haired young man peering from behind the edge of the pawn shop door-frame.

"Get the heck away from here!" he bawled. "Get yourselves knocked off some other place!"

Hoppy turned on him like a buffalo preparing to charge. But Simon grabbed one beefy bicep and yanked him back on his heels.

"Stop it, you fool!" he snapped. "Don't take it out on *him!*"

He stepped to the doorway, drawing the knife strapped to his forearm.

From within the pawn shop Ruby's voice, strident with fear, screeched, "Come in here and, so help me God, I'll blast ya!"

Simon spotted him crouching behind a counter, goggling over the sights of a sawed-off shotgun. He thrust out a knee as a barrier to Hoppy's impulsive acceptance of the challenge, and began working quickly.

He was aware of the scared faces

starting to peer out of windows, of people moving out of doorways and peeping around corners. A crowd seemed to be converging from every direction, drawn by the shots and the wildfire smell of excitement.

In a few seconds he cut out one of the bullets imbedded in the door frame. He dropped the scarred slug in his pocket, and moved away.

"Let's get out of here," said the Saint, taking Hoppy's arm. "I still think it would be a social error to be arrested on Sixth Avenue, even if they have tried to change the name to 'Avenue of the Americas.' "

"Who done it?" Mr. Uniatz asked again a few minutes later as the Saint expertly swung the convertible around a corner. "He makes me get mud on dis new suit."

"Never mind, Hoppy," Simon said. "It helps to tone down the pattern. Anyway, all I saw was two gentlemen with handkerchiefs over their faces in a black sedan with no rear license plate."

Hoppy scowled.

"I seen dat, too," he grumbled. "What I wanna know is, who wuz dey?"

"Did you notice the outside hand of the fellow driving the car? It flashed in the sun."

Mr. Uniatz blinked.

"Huh?"

"He was wearing a lot of finger jewelry."

"Finger jewelry?"

"Rings—large flashy rings."

For a long moment Hoppy strove painfully to determine the relation of the driver's digital ornamentation to his identity.

"Ya can't never tell," he concluded despondently.

The car swung east to Fifth Avenue and then south, moving leisurely with the traffic.

The Saint was in no hurry. He wanted a breathing spell to summarize the situation.

Two attempts had been made to murder him since the affair in the dressing room the previous night. An emotional thug might have found the Saint's insolence sufficiently provocative to inspire an urgent desire for his death—and certainly a blow in the solar plexus would be regarded in some circles as an act of war, and worthy of an act of reprisal.

But somehow, the Saint could not conceive of Dr. Spangler, even with that kind of provocation, taking the risk of a murder charge. For Spangler was neither emotional nor reckless. He was an operator who had learned from experience to be thrifty of risks, to allow as much margin of safety as possible to every enterprise.

An attempt to bribe Nelson was in line with that; but the only motive Spangler was likely to consider strong enough to justify an attempt at murder would be the fear that the Saint's interference might affect the Angel's chance of taking the title.

WOULD Spangler, even with a guilty conscience, have taken alarm so precipitately? Would he be afraid, on such scanty evidence, that the Saint had discovered the secret of the Angel's victories? For that matter, was there any secret more sinister than common chicanery and corruption? So far, he could only conjecture.

"And that," said the Saint, "leaves us just one more call to make."

"Who we gonna see now, boss?" asked Mr. Uniatz, settling philosophically into the social whirl.

"That depends on who's home."

Simon swung the car toward Gramercy Park and presently slowed down as he turned into a secluded side street lined with greystone houses as conservatively old-fashioned in their ways as the Riverside Drive brownstones were in theirs, but with a polished elegance that bespoke substantially higher rents.

"What home, boss?" Hoppy insisted practically.

The Saint peered at the numbers of the houses slipping by.

"Doc Spangler's."

Hoppy's eyes became almost as wide as shoe-buttons.

"Ya mean it's de Doc what tries to gun us?"

"It was more likely one of the bad boys he chums around with," said the Saint. "But he probably knew about it. Bad companions, Hoppy, are apt to get a man into trouble. Of course, you wouldn't know about that."

"No, boss," said Mr. Uniatz seriously.

The Saint was starting to pull in towards one of the greystone houses when he saw the other car. The rear license plate was on now, but there was no doubt about the genesis of the neat hole with its radiation of tiny cracks that perforated the rear window. Simon pointed it out to Hoppy as he kept the convertible rolling and parked it some twenty yards further down the block.

"Chees," Hoppy said in admiration. "I hit it right in de middle. Dey musta felt de breeze when it goes by."

"I hope it gave them as bad a chill as theirs gave us," said the Saint.

CHAPTER XIV

THEY walked back to the house and went up the stone steps and rang the bell. After a while the door opened a few inches. Simon leaned on it and opened it the rest of the way. It pushed back a long beanpole of a man with a sad horse face and dangling arms whose wrists stuck out nakedly from the cuffs of his sweater. And as he saw him, a gleam of recognition shot through the Saint's memory.

The tall man's recognition was a shade slower, perhaps because his faculties were slightly dulled by the surprise of feeling the door move into his chest. He exhaled abruptly and staggered back, his long arms flying loosely as though dangling on strings.

As he recovered his balance he took in Hoppy's monstrous bulk, and then the slim supple figure of the Saint closing the door after him and leaning on it with the poised relaxation of a watchful cat, the gun in his hand held almost negligently. Slowly, the long bony wrists lifted in surrender.

The young pawnbroker's description repeated itself in the Saint's memory. Also, he recalled Mike Grady's office and a tall thin character among the loiterers in the reception. This was the same individual. The odyssey of the gun was beginning to show connections.

"Who are you, chum?" Simon asked, moving lightly towards him.

"I know him, boss," Hoppy put in. "De name is Slim Mancini. He useta be a hot car hustler."

"I work here," the beanpole said in a whining nasal tenor that had a distinct equine quality about it. "I'm the butler." Mancini glanced back at a door down the hall and opened his mouth a fraction of a second before the Saint stepped behind him and clamped a hand over it.

"No announcements, please," the Saint said, his other arm curving about Mancini's neck like a band of flexible steel. "This is strictly informal. You understand, don't you?"

The man nodded and gasped a lungful of air as the Saint removed the pressure on his throat.

"Slim Mancini buttlin'!" Hoppy sneered hoarsely. "Dat's a laugh." He grunted suddenly as Simon jabbed a warning elbow into his stomach.

The muffled voices in the room down the hall had gone silent.

"Walk ahead of us to that door," the Saint whispered to Spangler's cadaverous lackey, "and open it and go in. Don't say anything. We'll be right behind you. Go on."

Mancini's eyes suddenly widened as he stared over the Saint's shoulder, apparently at something behind him.

Simon rather resented that. It implied a lack of respect for his experience, reading background, and common intelligence that was silghtly insulting. However he was accommodating enough to start to turn and look in the indicated direction.

It was only a token start, and he reversed it so quickly that Mancini's hand

was still inches from his shoulder holster when the Saint's left exploded against his lantern jaw.

Simon caught the toppling body before it folded and lowered it noiselessly to the carpet.

Mr. Uniatz kicked it carefully in the stomach for additional security.

"De noive of de guy," he said. "Tryin' a corny trick like dat. Whaddas he t'ink we are?"

"He'll know better next time," said the Saint. "But now I suppose we'll have to open our own doors—"

Blam!

The stunning crash of a heavy-caliber pistol smashed against their eardrums and sent them diving to either side of the hallway.

The Saint lay there, Mancini's gun nestled in his fist. The shot had come from the room ahead, where they'd heard the voices. Then he noticed that the door was still shut . . . Seconds passed . . . A weak moan, muffled by the closed door, punctuated the silence.

Simon signaled Hoppy with a lift of his chin, and they stood up again and advanced noiselessly. He motioned Hoppy back into the shadows as they reached the door. Then he turned the knob, kicked the door open, and stayed to one side, out of reach of possible fire.

There was silence for a moment. All he could see in the sunlit portion of the room visible to him were a huge fireplace and a corner of a desk. Then from within came a challenge in an accent that was unmistakable.

"Well?" Doc Spangler barked impatiently. "Come in!"

The Saint stood there a moment, looking into the triangle of the interior visible to him, estimating his chances of meeting a blast of gunfire if he showed himself.

In the two seconds that he stood there, weighing the odds, he also realized that an unexpected diversion had taken place. What it was he didn't know. But it did lend some excuse for hoping his presence might yet be miraculously undiscovered.

It was a flimsy enough hope, but he decided to gamble on it. He signaled Hoppy to stay back and cover him as best he could, and stepped into the room.

DOC SPANGLER was seated at the desk, leaning forward, his arms on the desk, staring at him. Beyond him in a corner of the big room was Karl, down on one knee beside the prostrate body of a man whose head was concealed by the squat body of Spangler's ursine lieutenant. There was a gun in his hand, pointed at the Saint from his hip, as if he had been interrupted in his examination of the man he had apparently just shot.

For one second it was quite a skin-prickling tableau; and then Simon took a quick step to one side which placed Spangler's body between him and Karl's gun-muzzle.

"Better tell your baboon to lay his gun on the floor, Doc," he suggested and his smile was wired for sudden destruction. "You might get hurt."

Spangler half turned in his swivel chair toward Karl.

"You imbecile!" he spat, his usual fat complacency temporarily disconnected. "I told you to put up that gun! It's gotten me into enough trouble for one day. Put it on the floor as he says."

Karl laid the gun down and glared balefully past Spangler at the Saint.

"Thank you," said the Saint. "Now get up and stand away."

Karl rose to his feet and shuffled aside as the Saint stepped around the desk and came to a startled halt.

He was looking down incredulously at the face of the man lying on the floor. One side of it was caked with blood and the hair was red with it. But that presented no obstacle to recognizing the owner. It was Whitey Mullins.

Mr. Uniatz's heavy breathing reverberated in Simon's ear.

"Dey got Whitey!" His head jerked up suddenly at Karl and Spangler, his gun lifting. "Whitey was me pal!" he snarled. "Why you—"

Simon stopped him.

"Don't shoot the Doc yet. Whitey

may need him." The Saint's eyes were cold blue chips. "Let's have the score, Spangler, and make it fast."

"He isn't dead," wheezed the fat man damply. "It's only a graze. He brought it on himself, coming here to my home to assault me. Karl had to stop him, but he didn't hurt him much. You can see that. The bullet just grazed his scalp and went into the wall. See?"

He pointed a plump finger at a hole in the wall above Mr. Mullins' prostrate form.

Whitey moaned and opened his eyes.

"Saint!" he mumbled feverishly.

Simon pocketed his automatic and bent over him.

"Take it easy, Whitey. It's okay." He went on without turning his head. "Doc, I'll bet you a case of bourbon that Karl doesn't live to draw that gun he's trying to sneak out of his pocket."

"Eh?" Spangler grunted blankly.

Hoppy's attention flashed back to the danger on hand, swiveling his gun to the thug's belly. One of Karl's hairy paws had already dipped halfway into a coat pocket.

"Reach!" Mr. Uniatz rasped.

"Hands empty, please," Simon smiled pleasantly over his shoulder.

The squat gunman slowly dragged his hand out of his pocket and raised both arms over his head.

Simon stepped over to him and extracted a Colt automatic from his pocket. Then he proceeded to run his hands with expert deftness down Karl's sides, under his arms, inside his thighs, and along his back.

He patted his sleeves, paused, and plucked another gun from inside one of the gunman's cuffs. It looked like a toy, no longer than a magnificent watch-charm, but it held a .22 caliber shell in its chamber.

"Forgive me for underestimating you, comrade," he said. "You're a walking arsenal, aren't you?"

He pulled what seemed to be a fountain pen from Karl's breast pocket and examined it briefly. He chuckled, pushing Karl so that he stumbled backwards. Simultaneously, Simon exploded a capsule of tear gas from one end of the "fountain pen" squarely into the gangster's nose. Karl clutched his face with both hands and reeled halfway across the room, tripping over a chair and crashing to the floor.

"That stuff spreads!" Spangler gasped. "We'll all get it!"

"Take it easy," said the Saint. "The windows are open, and there isn't enough in one of those pills to do much harm unless it's shot straight at you."

"What do you want?" Spangler demanded, a glitter of panic in his eyes. He looked down at Whitey as the trainer gripped the edge of the desk for support and pulled himself to his feet with Hoppy's quick aid. Spangler pointed at him, his eyes narrowing. "I understand. You're working for *him,* now!"

Simon lighted a cigarette.

"Don't confuse yourself, Doc. Hoppy and I represent our own business only—the Happy Dreams Shroud and Casket Company. I'm sorry we weren't able to accommodate your boy Karl last night. We'd have liked to give him a fitting, but he was in such a hurry."

He glanced at Karl who was crawling blindly toward the door.

A leer of gargoyle delight transfigured Hoppy's features as he observed the proferred target. He took three steps across the room and, with somewhat better form than the previous night, launched a thunderous drop-kick that caught the unfortunate thug squarely, lifting his entire body off the floor in a soaring ballotade, and dropped him sprawling in a corner.

CHAPTER XV

SPANGLER stared fascinated at his limp cohort, and then again at Hoppy. His gaze swung uncertainly back to the Saint. He cleared his throat.

"I fail to comprehend," he began, with an attempt to regain his habitual pomposity, "why you should—"

"I'm quite sure you do comprehend," the Saint broke in suavely, "why I should resent your sending that goon over to my apartment last night to kill me."

Spangler opened and shut his mouth like a frog.

"*I* sent him to your apartment?" he said in shocked tones.

"You hoid him!" Hoppy growled.

"But my dear boy, I did no such thing!" Doc Spangler plucked a handkerchief from his breast pocket and mopped his shining pink brow. He frowned at Karl, who was beginning to stir again in the corner. "If he took it upon himself to visit you last night, it must have been a matter of personal inspiration. I had nothing to do with it, believe me."

"Strangely enough," said the Saint surprisingly, "I do."

"He's lyin'," Whitey grated fiercely. "He was gonna knock me off if you hadn't come when ya did."

"That's entirely untrue," Spangler said. "Mullins forced his way in here. He was abusive and threatening. When he tried to attack me Karl had to fire a shot in my defense."

"However," the Saint continued, "a repeat performance was staged less than an hour ago near Sixth Avenue, with three characters and a black sedan taking the chief roles in another attempt to reunite Hoppy and me with our illustrious ancestors."

"I assure you, sir, that I—"

"Excuse me," the Saint interrupted. "I'm willing to believe that Karl might attempt a solo mission on account of the kicking around we gave him in the dressing room, but there were three men in the second try. I'm rather certain the driver was Karl. He might have done that to grind a private axe, but the other two must have had other inducements, Doc, old boy. Inducements supplied by you, perhaps."

Spangler shook his head bewilderedly.

"You're entirely off the track, dear boy. Karl has been here in the house for the past three hours."

"Then he must have a twin running around loose gunning for me. As for the other two, I'd lay some odds that one of them was your new butler, Jeeves Mancini, the demon majordomo, who seemed to be sort of lying down on the job when I saw him. The third man," said the Saint dispassionately, "may very well have been you."

Spangler's expression of outraged innocence would have done credit to a clergyman accused of committing bigamy.

"But that's simply preposterous. I haven't been out of the house today. As a matter of fact, Karl and Slim and I were about to leave for the gym to meet the Angel when you arrived." He spread his hands.

"Surely you're not serious when you say you actually expected to find three anonymous snipers—men who tried to shoot you from a car like movie gangsters—here in my house?"

"I don't say I had that idea all along," Simon admitted. "It just kind of grew on me when I found their car parked in front of this house. *Your* Stanley Steamer, I presume, Dr. Livingstone?"

"What?" Spangler's eyes were round with appalled amazement. "My dear boy, are you sure you're not feeling the heat? My car has been parked there all day."

"I did feel the heat," said the Saint gently, "of your car's engine. For a jalopy that hadn't been moved all day, it was awful feverish."

"Standing out there in the sun—"

"It might get the chill off. But I hardly think the sun was quite hot enough to burn those holes through the rear window and the windshield."

Spangler sank back into his chair, shaking his head helplessly.

"I don't know what you're trying to prove," he protested earnestly. "But if you mean those bullet holes, they've been there for nearly a month now. One of the boys became a little exuberant one night and—"

"Skip it," said the Saint amiably. "I didn't come here to torment you by putting the stretch on your imaginative

powers. Any time a good story is needed, I'm sure you can come up with one. I just wanted to make one point for the record.

"The next time any uncomfortable passes are made at me or any of my friends—among whom I include Steve Nelson—I am automatically going to drop by and beat the daylights out of you and any of your teammates who happen to be around. It may seem rather arbitrary of me, Doc; but an expert like you should be able to allow for my psychopathic fixations. Let's go, Whitey."

WHITEY let go the desk unsteadily. "Okay. I can make it," he said, and waved away Hoppy's helpfully offered hand. He followed Simon, spitting contemptuously on the floor as he passed Karl's cowed figure huddled in the corner.

As they sped northward up Fifth Avenue, Mullins explained the predicament in which the Saint had found him.

"I guess I was nuts," he said, "goin' into that den of thieves alone. But I went off my chump just thinkin' of that lousy fink sendin' his stooges to proposition my boy."

"You shoulda gone heeled, pal," Hoppy said.

"I did," Whitey slapped his right hip. "But I just figured on bawling Spangler out, not killin' him. An' then I get blasted from behind."

"How long were you there?" Simon asked.

" 'Bout half an hour. Say!" Whitey's voice lifted as though remembering. "It couldna been Karl who was with those mugs what you said tried to gun you. He was in that room with Spangler most of the time I was cussin' the Doc." His pale eyes brightened with thought.

"Y'know, there's a coupla heist guys with the Scarponi mob who Spangler hires sometimes for jobs. They look a lot like Karl."

The Saint shrugged.

"He still might have made it. I figure that Karl got some of his pals together in a hurry after he left Steve's place, and followed Hoppy and me when we left. I wouldn't give him an alibi unless he punched a time clock. You certainly weren't in shape to time everything to the minute." He glanced at Whitey.

"We'd better drop you off at a doctor's so you can get that fixed up. How do you feel?"

"I'm okay, Saint," Whitey minimized. He felt his blood-clotted head gingerly. "The slug took a li'l hair off, that's all. Just drop me off at Kayo Jackson's gym. I'll wash up there."

"It's your noodle." Simon swung the wheel to his left and cut westward toward Sixth Avenue.

"Did you mean it," Whitey asked after a moment, "when you said you'd work with the champ?"

The Saint flashed a cigarette from his breast pocket and punched the dashboard lighter.

"You're the trainer, Whitey."

Whitey found a match in his pocket and struck it with his thumb, cupping the flame as he held it to the Saint's cigarette.

"Kayo'll go nuts when I tell him," he grinned. "Wit' you and the champ workin' out there together, we'll pack 'em in."

"At two bits a head," Mr. Uniatz mentioned, rather quickly for him. "So whaddas de boss get out of it?"

"I'll see that Kayo shells out with the Saint's cut of the gymnasium gate, don't worry."

"Hoppy is my agent," said the Saint.

He was thinking more about the slug he carried in his pocket—the slug he had dug out of the pawn shop door frame. He had to ponder the fact that neither Karl's guns nor Slim Mancini's were of the same caliber. And in spite of what he had said, he couldn't really visualize Doc Spangler doing his own torpedo work.

There was at least negative support for Whitey's evidence that Karl had been in the house during the time the Saint thought he'd seen him at the wheel of the gunmen's car. Yet Simon found it impossible to reconcile his pho-

tographic impression of the man who had driven that car with the possibility that it had been someone other than Karl. If it hadn't been Karl, then it had certainly been his identical twin.

* * * * *

The dawning sun arched a causeway of golden light through the Saint's bedroom window, glinting on his crisp dark hair as he laced on the heavy rubber-soled shoes in which he did his road work with Steve every morning. Hoppy, bleary-eyed, leaned against the door frame, watching him unhappily.

"Chees," he complained hoarsely, "will I be glad when de fight is over tomorrow night! I'm sick of gettin' up wit' de boids every mornin' to do road work wit' Nelson." He yawned cavernously. "Dis at'letic life is moider."

"*What* athletic life?" the Saint inquired with mild irony. "The only road work *you* do is follow behind in the car with Whitey."

Hoppy sighed lugubriously.

"Dat ain't de pernt, boss. It's just I don't get de sleep a guy needs at my age."

"Well, I must say you wear the burden of your years with lavender and old dignity," Simon complimented him. He stood up and headed for the door. "Come on, Steve and Whitey will be waiting for us."

Hoppy groaned and followed like an exhausted elephant.

They found Nelson near the 59th Street entrance of Central Park, alone.

"Whitey's got another of those headaches," he explained. "I think maybe that bullet Karl grazed him with last month must have shaken his brains up worse than he admitted."

The Saint nodded, breaking into an easy jogging trot beside Nelson as they struck out northward along the side of a winding park road.

"Could be," he agreed.

Mr. Uniatz climbed into the car again, and waited disconsolately for several minutes in order to give them a good head start. Then he started the car up and followed slowly behind.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME thirty minutes later the Saint and Steve Nelson were jogging eastward along the inner northern boundary of Central Park, following the edge of the park road. The Saint's long legs pumped in smooth tireless rhythm as he breathed the dew-washed fragrance of blooming shrubs that covered the green slopes. At that early hour there was practically no traffic passing through Central Park, and he filled his lungs with air untainted by the fumes of carbon monoxide.

During the past week, the regimen of training in which he had joined Steve Nelson had tempered his lithe strength to the whiplash resilience of Toledo steel and, as he ran, his blood seemed to tingle with the sheer exaltation of just living.

He glanced back once at the brooding shadow of Hoppy's face behind the wheel of the car far behind and chuckled. Nelson, trotting beside him, asked, "What's funny?"

The Saint nodded over his shoulder.

"Hoppy. He's miserable. Nobody to talk to. Nothing to drink."

Nelson looked back and grinned.

Ahead to his left, over the park wall some distance away, Simon could see the broad terminus of Lenox Avenue coming into view. Directly in front of them, through the trees, he caught the gleam of the lake that lies at the northern end of the park. The park road swoops sharply to the right at this point, paralleling the lake for a distance as it winds southward again.

The easy purr of an approaching car blended against and quickly drowned out the sound of the Saint's car hugging the edge of the road. The overtaking car accelerated as it came up to them and whirled past, disappearing around the curve some distance ahead.

The Saint peered after it thoughtfully. Only two private cars had passed

them since they'd started running, and both of them had been this same big limousine with the curtained windows.

"I hope you won't be too busy the day after the fight," Nelson said, glancing at him.

The Saint pondered his remark for a moment.

"That all depends. Why?"

"Connie and I have set the date for our wedding. Will you be my best man?"

The Saint's quick warm smile sparkled at him. "It'll be a pleasure, Steve."

Nelson slapped him on the back as they jogged along.

"Thanks."

"Will you be staying on at your place on Riverside Drive?"

"Yeah. Having it redecorated. As a matter of fact, they started work today. With luck the place will be finished when we get back from our honeymoon. However, the place is a mess right now."

"Why don't you move in with me until the day after tomorrow?" Simon suggested. "We've got a spare bed that you're welcome to."

"That's swell of you, Saint."

"No trouble at all. Besides, it'll be easier to keep an eye on you."

They padded on with tireless ease, tucking another mile behind them. The city was beginning to take on life. In the distance Simon could see the subway-entrance cupolas at the head of Lenox Avenue with early morning workers hurrying toward each of them. But the park as yet seemed quite deserted.

The lake was like a sheet of silvered glass with a covey of green rowboats huddled along the near shore about the boat house. As they approached the curve in the road the path narrowed and the Saint crossed over to the opposite side to run parallel with Steve.

He had just reached the curve when he heard, with startling suddenness, the roar of a car approaching behind him. He glanced over his shoulder. The black limousine that had already passed them twice was crossing over to his side of the road with swiftly increasing acceleration and rushing straight at him.

IN THAT split second, he perceived with crystal clarity the bony high-shouldered figure hunched over the wheel, eyes crinkled with murderous intent, and knew instantly that the driver had stalked them in the hope of catching him apart from Nelson.

He flung himself down the gentle embankment that sloped to the sidewalk before he even heard Nelson's warning yell.

The big limousine screamed around on two wheels as it tried to stick to the curve, but its mile-a-minute momentum was too great. It bounded sideways over the slope, entirely clearing the iron railing that bordered the sidewalk. It struck the concrete pavement with a sickening crash, and took a fifteen foot bounce into the lake, landing on its top, its wheels just visible above the water and still spinning.

The Saint leaped to his feet and ran to the water's edge with Nelson sprinting down the embankment after him. A screech of brakes knifed the morning stillness as Hoppy leaped out of his car to join them.

"He ran at you deliberately!" Nelson blurted as he came up.

"That's my trouble—can't keep my fans away," said the Saint, and plunged into the water.

"Let him croak!" Hoppy bellowed breathlessly as he came running up. "De bum was trying to get ya!"

The Saint needed only one dive to tell him what he wanted to know. Nelson read the truth on his face when he came to the surface and rejoined him on the sidewalk.

"You know him?" he asked.

"Doc Spangler," the Saint said laconically, "is going to need a new butler."

He glanced up at the park's Lenox Avenue entrance. Several people, appearing magically, were running down to the scene of the "accident."

"Let's get out of here," he said, and bounded back over the iron fence and up the embankment.

Hoppy and Nelson followed him. They got into the car and sped away as an approaching police-car siren lifted its high clear alarm on the morning air.

"Spangler again," Nelson muttered grimly, staring straight ahead.

A stream of earnest profanity issued from Mr. Uniatz's practiced lips.

"You shoulda stuck a knife in de rat when you was under wit' him," he concluded. "Dose jackasses back dere are liable to pull him out before he drowns."

"They'll have to pull him off that steering column first," Simon said callously. "He's stuck on it like a bug on a pin."

"But why," Steve Nelson puzzled, "did he try to do it? What has he got against *you?*"

"Maybe he thinks I'm bringing you luck. If I'm out of the way he's backing the Angel to take care of you."

Nelson said nothing for a moment. Then he shook his head.

"It doesn't make good sense," he said. "I don't get it."

The Saint shrugged.

"Forget it. Spangler and his outfit are a bunch of psychopaths, anyway." He unhooked a key from his ring and handed it to Nelson. "You can use this to get into my apartment. I'll use Hoppy's key."

Nelson took it with troubled gratitude. "Thanks a lot, Saint. I expect I'll take my stuff over sometime this afternoon. I've got some things to do before I move."

"I've a few things to attend to myself," said the Saint. "Move in whenever you're ready."

They let Steve Nelson out at the 49th Street end of the Park where he'd parked his car. He put a hand on the Saint's arm, leaning over the door of the convertible.

"Tell me," he asked worriedly, "what goes on between you and Spangler? Why does he hate you so?"

A bantering smile touched the Saint's lean cynical face.

"We're mutually allergic, I guess," he said. "Don't worry about it."

Steve sighed and shook his head perplexedly. He turned and walked to his car.

"Where to now, boss?" Hoppy inquired as the Saint drove the car out into the tide of Fifth Avenue.

"Mike Grady's," Simon Templar said flatly.

CHAPTER XVII

MICHAEL GRADY was incredulous. He leaned forward in his swivel chair, his mouth open and his eyebrows lifted in soaring arches.

"Two attempts on your life!" he repeated. "By Spangler?"

The Saint, relaxed in one of Grady's worn leather chairs, studied him through drifting cirrus clouds of cigarette smoke.

"Not by Spangler in person, perhaps. He's too smart and too fat for that." He sent a playful smoke ring soaring over Mike's carroty dome like a pale blue halo. "He merely pays people to try to kill me."

"Of course," he added thoughtfully, when I say two attempts, I'm not counting the first try by brother Karl. Let's say he did that on his own and give the good Doc the benefit of any doubt I may have on that particular score.

"The other attempts were more up Doc Spangler's alley. One showed organized effort. The other—well, it could have been an accident, you know, giving Mancini an out if he got caught. The last two tries had brains behind them."

A confused scowl furrowed Grady's brow.

"And why," he asked, "should you be so quick to make a case against Doc Spangler? He told me all about your crashin' his house and roughin' up his hired help and then accusin' him of those same things you've come to me about."

"Really?" Simon flicked ash into a nearby tray. "The Doc is burning his

candor at both ends these days.

"There are men," Grady said sententiously, "who make more than a man's proper share of enemies for no proper reason." He pointed a stubby finger at the Saint. "And you, Mr. Templar, are one of them."

The Saint bowed graciously.

"I've always been rather proud of my enemies, Mike. They're usually the sort that every man ought to make." His mouth curved in a crooked smile. "Did your friend Spangler tell you that Karl also shot Whitey Mullins? We found him bleeding on the carpet when we got there."

"I know all about that! If Whitey or anybody else goes to another man's house to raise a shindy he should be prepared to take the consequences." Grady's lip curled scornfully.

"And that's the manager Nelson picks for himself, is it? Ivory from the neck up! It's two of a kind they are, and no mistake." He leaned forward again. "Why, I ask you, should Spangler want to put you away? Why? Give me one reason I can believe."

THE Saint smiled sympathetically as he said:

"Mysterious, isn't it? Or have I already told you that he's afraid I might be able to show Steve how to beat the Angel?"

Grady snorted impatiently.

"There's no man livin' who can beat the Angel! And nobody can make a winner out of a second-rater like Steve Nelson!"

The Saint's brows lifted politely.

"Second-rater? He only happens to be the champion. If you're betting your shirt on the Angel, I hope you have a good laundry. You might have to wait a long time for—"

He stopped short as he saw Grady tense, staring past him. The Saint looked back.

Connie Grady and Steve Nelson stood in the open doorway. They came in hand in hand, Nelson shutting the door behind them as they entered, his youthful face set and determined.

The Saint rose lazily to his feet as Grady's eyes flashed with angry suspicion from Nelson to his daughter.

"What's the meaning of this?" bellowed the promoter, kicking his chair away and coming out from behind his desk.

CONNIE'S lips parted to speak, but Nelson stepped forward before she could say a word.

"You'd better ask *me* that, Mr. Grady," he said, and glanced at the Saint. "Sorry, I didn't know you were here, or we'd have waited."

"All right!" Grady roared. "Then I'm askin' you! What the devil do you mean bustin' into my office? And how many times have I got to be tellin' you to keep away from my daughter, you penny-ante palooka!"

"Don't you dare talk to him like that!" Connie cried, her green eyes flashing angrily. "I'm going to marry him right after the fight, with or without your permission!"

Grady's mouth dropped open. He swallowed.

"The heck you say," he finally choked out.

"Perhaps," Simon murmured, "you family people would like to be alone."

He edged toward the door, but Nelson grabbed his arm.

"No, stick around. You're my best man, aren't you?"

Grady wheeled on the Saint.

"Best man, is it?" he yelled. "So it's a plot!"

"Not so far as I'm concerned," the Saint said hastily.

"You listen to me, Mike." The fighter seized Grady by the lapel. "Seeing that you're going to be my father-in-law, you might as well—"

"In a pig's eye!" Grady sputtered. "Let go me coat, you punch-drunk clown, or I'll—"

He turned and grabbed a boxing trophy that stood on his desk. Nelson ducked nimbly and clutched his wrist, shaking the heavy metal statuette from his grasp.

"You might as well get used to the

idea, Mike," said the Saint. "It seems to be settled that Steve loves Connie and Connie loves Steve, and they're going to be married. Since they're both of age I don't see that there's anything you can do about it."

"Oh, Daddy!" Connie pleaded, coming around to face him, "you're acting like a spoiled child. You've got nothing against Steve."

"Let go me arm!" Grady snapped at Nelson, "or are you trying to break it, you foul-fightin' blackguard?"

NELSON released him and stepped back.

"I came here to tell you because I don't want you to say I ever did anything behind your back, Mike," he explained.

Connie threw her arms around her father, looking up into his face.

"Darling, you know darn well you haven't any real reason for not liking Steve."

"I know it's all on account of your wanting Connie to have the best, Mike," Nelson said. "I know I'm not a millionaire, maybe, but—"

"We'll have enough," Connie put in. "Even—" She looked at Steve nervously, the shadow of her fear passing over her face—"even if he doesn't fight tomorrow night."

"I'll be in plenty good shape to take care of a wife," Nelson grinned. "Especially *after* tomorrow night."

Grady gazed at him a moment with lack-lustre eyes. Then he pushed Connie away, grabbed his hat from a corner of his desk, jammed it on his head and stalked to the door.

"Dad, wait!" she cried.

The door slammed shut behind him as he left.

"Congratulations," the Saint smiled from the depths of the club chair into which he had retired, one leg slung over a leather upholstered arm. "He'll dance at your wedding yet."

"Oh, I do hope so," said the girl. The rosy flush of effort that tinted her smooth elfin features was fading to an unhappy pallor. "Oh, Steve . . ."

"Cheer up," said the Saint. "Your old man really likes him. He just guessed wrong about Steve at first and he's too bullheaded to admit it."

He climbed to his feet once more.

"Have lunch with us," Steve invited eagerly. "We have a table at the Brevoort. We're going over to your place first so I can leave my stuff, and then we—"

"Bless you, my children," the Saint interrupted, "but I happen to have a prior engagement. Some other time, perhaps."

He lifted a hand in a debonair gesture of farewell, opened the door and sauntered out before the argument could continue.

He did not mean to be rude, but he had a sudden intuition where Michael Grady had gone, and he did not want to be too far behind. . . .

MIKE GRADY sat slumped in a corner of the sofa in Doc Spangler's study, moodily chewing an unlit cigar. Spangler, his elbows on the desk, pressed his fingertips together with injured reproach pointedly visible behind a film of charlatan good humor.

"My dear Mike," he argued, "every successful man in this game is the natural target of vile rumor and malicious gossip. I'm hurt that you, with all your experience with that sort of thing, should give even the most hesitant sort of credence to this thing you've mentioned."

"I didn't say I believed it," Grady snapped. "I just want to get your side of it, that's all."

"If Karl attacked Templar, it was entirely on his own volition, Mike, I assure you. After all, the Saint gave him sufficient reason, don't you think?"

"Okay," Grady said. "Maybe so. But what about the thing that happened this morning? I picked up this paper on my way down here. It's on the front page. Look." He picked up the early afternoon edition from his lap and tossed it on to Spangler's desk. "According to that it was an accident. But was it? Did Templar tell me the truth?

Did Mancini try to run him down?"

Spangler shrugged, spreading his hands helplessly.

"Now how would I know? Certainly Slim had as much reason as Karl had to attempt a, shall we say, retributive act? That is, if it *wasn't* an accident, which it may well have been."

He sighed. "After all, the manhandling that both of them have suffered from Templar and that gorilla of his would be enough to tax the forbearance of far less—uh—angelic creatures than Karl and Slim, poor fellow. After all, Mike, I'm certainly no nursemaid. Nor do I keep any of my employees on a leash."

"Yeah, yeah," Mike agreed restlessly, removing the cigar from his mouth. "But that isn't all. There's talk. About that last fight. Torpedo Smith's death is still being—well, talked about. There are rumors—"

"Rumors, rumors . . . ." The fat man shook his head ruefully. "And you listen? Where do you suppose they originate? From Steve Nelson's camp, of course. Trying to discredit me, to smear the Angel. Nelson knows very well he hasn't a chance against my man, so he's preparing his alibi in advance. Can't you see that?

"You know and I know that the real reason the Angel wins is because of the psycho-hypnotic technique I use in my training methods. It gives that great hulk of a fellow power and speed many times greater than any man is normally capable of."

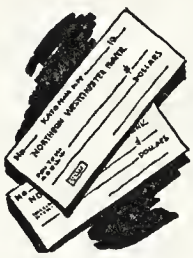
"Maybe so." Grady stuck his cigar back between his teeth and wagged a warning forefinger at Spangler. "But I tell you right here and now, Doc, if that man Smith was killed because of anything shady—"

"My dear Mike!" Spangler protested aggrievedly. "Trust my intelligence if nothing else!" He spread his hands widely. "What possible reason could *I* have to wish him harm?"

"A very good reason indeed, Doctor," drawled the Saint.

Both men's eyes jerked to the open doorway.

CHAPTER XVIII



SIMON TEMPLAR stood there, the automatic in his hand held with deceptive negligence.

"The Saint!" Spangler got out.

An unhealthy flush suffused his florid face, and his hands dropped to his lap behind the desk.

"Yes, gentlemen," Simon Templar smiled. "However, you'll notice this little gadget I'm holding is not a harp. Hands on the desk, please, Doc."

Spangler obeyed slowly, the habitual good humor on his face distorted into a parody of itself.

Grady found his voice.

"What's this?" he rasped angrily. "Are you following me around?"

"Rather fortunately for you, I am," said the Saint. "I overheard just enough of your conversation to settle a lot of early doubts about your honesty. Which only leaves your intelligence more in doubt than ever."

Spangler suddenly yelled, *"Karl! Help!"*

Simon shook his head regretfully.

"Don't strain your larynx, Doctor. It won't do you any good. We met Brother Mancini's successor at the door. My friend Mr. Uniatz is watching over him in the hall to see that no one disturbs his slumber." The Saint glanced at the knuckles of his left hand affectionately. "If this happens much more often I'm afraid the Butlers' Union will put you on the blacklist."

Grady climbed to his feet, an angry glint in his eye.

"Now look here," he began.

There was a sudden scurry of footfalls in the hall, and the other door slammed open just ahead of a wrathful howl from Hoppy.

The Saint sighed. "I guess Karl is on his way to report to you now. I was hoping he'd sleep longer than that."

"What's the meaning of this?" Grady spluttered.

"Yes," Spangler said, all pretense at good humor blotted out by the hatred that simmered behind the onyx sheen of his eyes, "What do you want?"

"Your signature," said the Saint easily. He walked up to Spangler's desk, fishing two checks from his pocket. He laid them before Spangler.

"You'll notice that both of these are for the same amount. The amount, you can verify, is the total of the winner's shares of all the purses that your masked moron has won through practices that are extremely illegal."

Spangler looked up at him sharply, his hands slipping off the desk.

"You're stark crazy!" he blared.

"Do keep your hands on top of the desk, Doctor," Simon reminded him pleasantly. "That's better—both of these checks, you'll observe, are payable to the Simon Templar Foundation for the Relief of Distressed Pugilists."

"What?" Spangler squealed incredulously.

"What kind of racket is this?" Grady demanded.

A ghost of a smile touched the Saint's face. He stepped to one side and glanced at the door as Hoppy's heavy footsteps pounded back through the outer door, into the hallway and clomped to a halt in the doorway of the room.

Mr. Uniatz stood there a moment, catching his breath.

"He got away," he announced with dark disgust, "when I wasn't lookin'."

"Don't worry about it," Simon said. "We'll put an ad in the paper." He returned to Spangler, who had risen to his feet behind his desk as the massive frame of Mr. Uniatz filled the doorway. "As you see, Doc, I've already signed one of those checks. Now you are going to sign the other."

Spangler turned sharply to Grady.

"You're a witness, Mike. It's blackmail, extortion!"

"Hardly that," Simon corrected him. "Those are simply the stakes in our bet, Doctor. I'm betting that Barrel House Bilinski will be knocked out tomorrow night."

For a long narrow-lidded moment, Doc Spangler gaped at the Saint. And then a slow grin began to spread over his face.

"And that," he queried softly, "is what you want me to sign?"

The Saint nodded amiably.

"Exactly. If you don't, I'm afraid our friend Inspector Fernack will have to drop in and ask you some awkward questions."

A deep chuckle seemed to boil up from the fat man's rotund belly. The chuckle broke into a hearty laugh that shook his chins.

"My dear Mr. Templar!" he said deprecatingly, waving a pudgy hand. "Put away that gun." He wiped his eyes with his cuff as though overcome by some secret joke, and looked down at his desk, still chuckling. "Where's my pen?" He found it and pulled the check toward him, leaning over the desk. He looked up. "Mike Grady will hold these checks, of course?"

"That's okay with me."

"Now wait," Grady frowned, plagued by a vague troubled puzzlement. "I don't want no part—"

"Of course you do," the Saint insisted persuasively. "I assure you this is on the up-and-up, Mike."

"At least," Spangler agreed genially, "I know I can trust *you.*" He bent over and signed the other check with a flourish and held them both out to Grady. "If you please, Mike."

Grady took them reluctantly.

"Nothing would please me more," Spangler gurgled, "than to have your check bounce, Mr. Templar. I should enjoy sending you to jail for something like that. It would certainly look well in the newspapers." He licked his lips as if already tasting the Saint's ignominy. "Famous Adventurer Sentenced to a Year and a Day in County Hoosegow!"

"That wouldn't be nearly so embarrassing," the Saint said imperturbably, "as twenty years in Sing Sing for second degree murder. I don't think you really wanted to kill Torpedo Smith. But nevertheless he died on account of you."

Spangler's jaw fell open. He started to speak.

"Now look here," Grady tried again. "I don't like this a bit, Saint. I certainly don't want to be mixed up in any shady deal."

"Just the same, you're going to hold those bets," said the Saint. "And you want me to drive you back to your office now. Come along."

"I warn you," Spangler said bleakly, "that I shall hold both of you to the exact terms of that bet. If you try to welsh on it, the Betting Commissioner—"

"Your fadder's mustache!" Mr. Uniatz quoted delicately.

He spread a large horny hand over Spangler's beefy face, and pushed with the force of a locomotive piston. Doc Spangler crashed backwards against his chair and toppled thunderously to the floor, chair and all. He was still sprawled there as Simon and Hoppy conducted Grady firmly out of the house.

"I can't tell you how glad I am," the Saint said as they drove northward up Fifth Avenue, "to know that you're not in cahoots with Spangler, Mike. That was the thing that bothered me most of all."

"Thanks for the bill of health," Grady responded caustically. "It's that relieved I am." He scowled. "But I can't say I go for the high-handed way you have of orderin' me about at the point of a gun!"

"Forgive me," the Saint apologized, "but I couldn't take any chances of being deprived of your company for lunch."

"I got too many things to do right now, Saint. I got no time for lunch. Just get me back to the Arena as quick as you can."

"It won't take much time," Simon smiled dreamily. "I've got a table at the Brevoort."

Grady frowned. "Well, I'll see if I can make it."

They parked in front of the Arena and Simon accompanied Grady inside to his office.

The girl at the switchboard called out as they entered Mike's office. "There have been several calls from your daughter, Mr. Grady, and from Mr. Mullins."

"Okay," Grady grunted, and picked up the stack of letters and messages piled on his desk. "Wonder what Whitey Mullins wants," he muttered, thumbing through the sheaf. "According to this pile of call notes he's phoned six times."

THE telephone rang. Grady lifted the receiver.

"Who? . . . Okay, put him on . . . Hello, Whitey?" . . ." Mike Grady suddenly stiffened as he listened. He paled visibly and for a few seconds listened in silence.

Presently he asked: "In the Saint's apartment? What was he doing there? . . . Yes, of course. I'll be down as soon as I possibly can."

He hung up and then turned to the Saint.

"Steve Nelson has been shot," he said. "In your apartment."

The Saint's whole being seemed to stand still in the same timeless stasis that affected the expansion of his ribs.

"Karl," he said slowly and bitterly, as if to himself. "Waiting for me in my apartment . . ."

Grady looked stupidly at him.

"No. At least, Whitey says the police don't think it was anyone layin' for you at your place. Whoever did it was waitin' for you on the roof of the apartment house across the street. There's a bullet hole in the window of the room where Connie found him."

"Connie?" the Saint repeated, knowing even as he said it how it must have happened.

"She was waiting for him in the car while he went up to your place to leave his things. He was going to stay with you, wasn't he?"

Simon nodded.

"Where is he?"

"Bellevue. They got the bullet out of him. Whitey says they think he's got a fifty-fifty chance." Grady's face fur-

rowed with pain. "The poor kid . . . He's a fine boy, Saint. I've been just a darn fool, and that's a fact!"

He glared at Simon defensively.

"Listen, Mike." The Saint gripped his arm. "Whoever did it must've thought it was me. It could only have been one of Spangler's men. It was my fault that this happened."

"But why should Spangler want to do *you* in?"

"He's afraid that I'll find out what he's been up to. I started the whole thing by butting in after the Torpedo Smith fight. Now I've got to finish it. Listen—I've got to take Steve's place tomorrow night!"

GRADY'S eyes bugged in surprise as he exclaimed:

"What?"

"You heard me! You've got to put me in against the Angel!" The Saint's steely fingers tightened about Grady's arm. "You've got to, Mike!"

"B-but—"

Grady stopped short and looked at him for a long moment. He stepped backwards and studied him critically. He said finally:

"Well, you look big enough. And hard enough, I guess. I've heard how you can hit . . ."

"I've been working with Steve," said the Saint. "I'm in as good condition as a man ever was, Mike. And I can take Bilinski, believe me!"

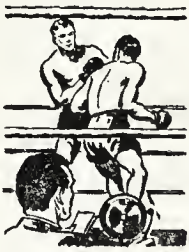
"But it's ridiculous!" Grady exploded. "There's never been such a fight."

Simon said swiftly, "Make an announcement in the ring. Tell them about my bet with Spangler. If they want their money back, they can have it. If they just want to see a fight—even if it's only the Saint—"

"*Only* the Saint!" Grady's eyes took fire. A luminous, inspired glow spread over his round freckled face. "Holy mackerel! Maybe it won't be a championship fight as advertised, but with *you* in it—"

"Come on then," Simon pulled him toward the door. "Let's go. I've got to get hold of Whitey right away!"

CHAPTER XIX



THE opening preliminary was already under way when the Saint, with Hoppy and Patricia Holm, strode through the tag-end of the crowd of street urchins who eddied about the artists' entrance of the Manhattan Arena.

Whitey met them in the doorway.

"I was gettin' worried," he said anxiously. "What happened to ya? The show's started."

He started them down the corridor that turned off to the dressing-room section. The Saint stopped him.

"Whitey, will you show Miss Holm to her seat? I don't think she can find her way up front from this part of the Arena."

The tempting curve of Miss Holm's red mouth drew to a pout.

"You mean I've got to spend the next hour or so in solitary confinement?"

"Well, you certainly can't spend it in my dressing room," said the Saint. "It's not exactly a ladies' boudoir."

Whitey nodded to Patricia, in visible awe of her golden-blond beauty.

"Sure, just follow me," he said. He turned to Simon. "I'll check on the Angel's handwraps on my way back."

They disappeared around a turn whence the din of noise from the crowd was flowing like the muted roar of distant surf.

The Saint moved on with Hoppy to his dressing room, feeling the ghostly fingers of peril once more playing their familiar cadenza along his vertebrae.

Every instinct told him that tonight he was fighting for greater stakes than glory or dollars. Tonight would be more than a mere encounter with padded gloves. Tonight he would be fighting for his life.

A swarthy snaggle-toothed character in a dirty polo shirt was seated on a broken-down chair as they entered the dressing-room. Hoppy recognized him at once.

"Mushky," he growled, "I t'ought you was in de Angel's corner."

"So I am, chum, so I am," Mr. Mushky Thompson agreed affably. "I gotta take a gander when you bandage de Saint's hands."

"That's what I admire about this business," Simon remarked cheerfully. "Everyone trusts everyone else."

Hoppy fixed Mr. Thompson with a baleful glare.

"Out, ya bum!" he ordered .

"Now wait," Mushky protested. "It's de rules."

"Oh, let him alone," said the Saint. "Whitey is watching the Angel, isn't he? It isn't exactly a unilateral proposition."

"Sure," Mr. Thompson agrced with hasty anxiety. "No causc for gettin' mad, Hoppy. I'm just one of de hired hands."

Hoppy grunted and proceedcd about the business of laying out the hand-bandages, adhesive tape, rubber mouthpiece, collodion, ammonia and other paraphernalia of the modern gladiator.

"You working with Karl, Mushky?" the Saint asked casually as he slipped out of his street clothes.

Thompson shook his head.

"Naw. He got kicked in the face by a beer-wagon horse. Broke his jaw in two places, I hear."

Hoppy looked at him a moment, and broke into a deep guffaw.

"Ya don't say," he yakked.

Simon slipped into his dark purple sateen trunks and began to lace his boxing shoes swiftly as Hoppy tore strips of adhesive tape into suitable knuckle-strips.

Mushky Thompson lounged in his chair with a cigarette dangling from a corner of his mouth until Hoppy had finished taping the Saint's hands with practised precision, reinforcing the bones without impairing their freedom. Then Mushky got to his feet.

"Good luck," he threw over his shoulder. "You'll need it."

"Thanks," Hoppy said—and did a double take after the jibe sank in.

"Come back here!" the Saint snapped, as Mr. Uniatz started after the Angel's second. "Don't start anything *now,* you idiot!"

Hoppy made unintelligible gravelly noises through his bared teeth, his nuclear mind infected as much by the vibrant blood-cry of the mob as by the taunt. Impending battle—his own or anyone else's—was apt to make Mr. Uniatz emotionally unstable.

Three preliminaries and a semi-final later, the Saint lay on the rubbing table, completely relaxed, listening to ten thousand throats shaking the walls in a massive chorus of excitement.

The semi-final had ended in a knock-out, he guessed from the uproar. He stretched his length peacefully, his eyes closed, everything in him settled in an immeasurable stillness amid the swirling rumble of vociferation.

DIMLY he heard the orotund bellow of the announcer introducing somebody after the roar of the crowd had died down a bit—and shortly afterwards the man who had becn introduced began speaking over the public address system, and he recognized Grady's unmistakable accents even though he could not make out the words.

Hoppy stumbled into the dressing-room, breathless from battling the crowd en route.

"What a mob!" he wheezed, his eyes gleaming. "Grady's up dere makin' dat announcement!"

A swelling ululation rose in a tidal wave of sound and broke thunderously upon their ears.

"Sounds like dey like what he told 'em, huh?" Hoppy exulted, coming over to the Saint. "Boss, what does Spangler say when Grady tells him ya goin' in for Nelson?"

The Saint yawned.

"Oh, he raised a little stench about it at first, but Mike reminded him that my bet stated that Bilinski would be knocked out—it didn't say by whom. So he changed his mind. By the way, did Pat get a good seat?"

"Yeah." Hoppy chuckled hoarsely. "An' guess who's she sittin' next to!"

"Are you training for a quiz program, or would you just like to tell me?"

"Inspector Foinack!"

The Saint considered him reverently for a moment, while the forthcoming possibilities of that supernal juxtaposition developed the gorgeous gamut of their emotional potential.

"Oh, my word!" Simon breathed. "I'd rather watch that than my own fight."

There was a patter of footsteps and Whitey Mullins darted into the dressing room. His face was contorted with savage glee.

"Okay," he croaked. "You're on, Saint. They're waitin' for you!" He snatched up the water bucket. "Grab the water bottle and sponge," he yelped at Hoppy, and went to the door.

The Saint swung his long legs off the table to the floor and stood up. He followed Whitey out of the door into the corridor, with Hoppy bringing up the rear.

"Brother, I only wisht it was that doity crook, Spangler, you was smackin' around tonight," Mullins grated with vitriolic bitterness as they mounted the ramp into the Arena, "and not just that dumb ox he stole from me."

Simon sensed an excitement, a temper in the crowd that was different from the usual mass tension of the ordinary fight attendance at Grady's weekly shows. It was electric with anticipation of the unexpected, a breathless waiting watchfulness that he felt as he mounted to the apron of the ring and slipped between the ropes amid a thunderclap of acclaim. There was a slight note of hysteria in it, he thought, as he seated himself on the stool in his corner and looked about at the ocean of faces that spread on every side.

The Masked Angel hadn't appeared yet, but the Saint rather expected that. Spangler would try every trick in the bag, including the petty one of wearing down the opposition's nerves by making him wait.

He failed to spot Pat among the buzzing tide of faces at ringside, but everything beyond the glare of light centering on the ring was little more than a smoke-dimmed blur.

The faces, void of all individuality, were such as one encounters sometimes in nightmare sequences, a phantasmagoria of eyes and noses. He wondered momentarily if Steve was in good enough shape to listen to the fight from his bedside. Connie had been with him nearly all day at the hospital.

A roar like an approaching forest fire filled the packed coliseum with surging clamor as the Masked Angel mounted the ramp, preceded by Doc Spangler and followed by a cohort of handlers bearing the various accessories of refreshment and revival.

The incredible bulk of the Angel loomed up over the apron of the ring and squeezed between the ropes in his corner. Unmasked now, his ridiculous little nubbin of a head bobbed from side to side in acknowledgment of the roars of the mob, his round little cheeks and button nose more an inspiration for laughter than the fearsome horror his black mask had aroused.

Behind him, Doc Spangler leaned over his shoulder and spoke softly into an ear that was the approximate size and shape of a brussels sprouts.

As the Saint watched them from beneath lowered lids, he felt a chill wind blow up and down his spine. He was fully aware that his real danger was as yet undetermined, the point of attack unknown. How it would come, in what shape or form, he wasn't quite sure.

HE'D covered all the possibilities, or so he thought—but whether the threat, the unknown weapon that the Angel must surely possess, would come from an act of the Angel himself, or from some outside agent, he wasn't quite sure. All he had was an idea—he felt its shadow upon him like a ghostly mist, ambient and all-pervading. . . .

The bell clanged sharply a few times —the throbbing hum of the crowd subsided somewhat. The main-bout referee, dapper and fresh in white tennis shoes and flannels, stepped to the center of the ring and gestured the Saint

and the Angel to come to him.

Simon rose, followed by Whitey and Hoppy, and came forward to face the Angel, who shambled up to the referee, flanked by Spangler and Mushky Thompson.

The Angel towered over them all, an utterly gross, unlovely specimen of so-called homo sapiens.

The referee droned the familiar formula: " . . . break when I say break . . . no hitting in breaks, no rabbit or kidney punches . . . protect yourself at all times . . . shake hands and come out fighting!"

They touched gloves, and the Saint walked nonchalantly back to his corner. He rubbed his feet a couple of times on the resin sprinkled there while Hoppy pulled the stool out of the ring. The sound of the bell seemed unreal and far away when, after what seemed an extraordinarily long time, it finally rang.

The Saint turned and moved almost casually out of his corner to meet the slowly approaching Angel. Bilinski shuffled forward, peering between forearms lifted in front of him. His body was bent almost double so that his elbows guarded his belly while his gloves shielded his face. No legally vulnerable square inch of his body was unprotected.

He came forward steadily, inch by inch, making no attempt to lead or feint, merely coming forward with the massive low-gear irresistibility of a large tank, peering cautiously between the bulging barriers of his ham-sized arms.

The Saint moved around him in a half-circle, every muscle, every nerve completely at ease. He was oblivious of the crowd now, studying his problem with almost academic detachment, the latent lightning in his fists perfectly controlled.

He couldn't help feeling the same guarded wonder that he knew Torpedo Smith and, for that matter, all of the Angel's opponents must have felt at the apparent impotence of the Angel's attack right up to the moment of the blow that sent them on the way to oblivion.

He thought to himself, *Nothing happens in the first round . . . nothing ever happens in the first round.*

The crux of his problem, he felt sure, was what the Angel did to open his victims for the inevitable knockout later on.

Bilinski, apparently growing tired of following Simon around the ring, stopped in the center and remained there, crouched, merely revolving to follow the Saint's lackadaisical circumvolutions about him.

The cash customers began to shake the stadium with the drumming of their stamping feet in the familiar demand for action—a demand, Simon thought, which was no more than fair.

Accordingly, he stepped in, threw a left that cracked like a whiplash against the Angel's fleshy forearms, and crossed with a downward driving right that strove to crash past into the massive belly beyond.

But the Angel instinctively brought his arms closer together so that the Saint's gloved fist thudded into their bone-centered barrier.

Bilinski, visibly startled by the numbing shock of the blow, even though he did catch it on his guard, flung his arms about the Saint in an octopus-like clutch, sagging slightly in order to let his overwhelming weight smother his opponent's efforts to strike again. But Simon, familiar with the old strength-sapping trick, merely relaxed with him and waited for the referee to come between them.

From her seat at ringside, Patricia Holm, her hands gripping the arms of her chair, pleaded with tense anxiety, "Watch him, Simon! Be careful!"

"He'd better watch while he can," Inspector Fernack gibed sardonically. He leaned back in his seat beside her and yelled: "All right, you Angel, shake him loose and let him have it! Give him one for me!"

The referee was still battling to break the Angel's drowning-man grip when the bell ended the round.

CHAPTER XX

AS HE walked to his corner, the Saint noticed that there were no boos from the crowd over the inaction of that opening round. There was merely a more intense current of anticipatory excitement, as though everyone felt he was about to witness a phenomenon of nature which, while it might be delayed somewhat, would take place as ineluctably as a predicted eclipse of the sun.

The betting, Simon knew, was not on whether or not he'd be knocked out, but rather precisely when and how that event would occur.

Hoppy wiped non-existent perspiration from the Saint's brow.

"Dat foist round wuz slow motion, boss," he rasped encouragingly. "How-ja feel?"

The Saint smilled coolly.

"Fine. Where's Whitey?"

"He forgot de towels." Hoppy thrust the mouth of the water-bottle at Simon's lips. "Take a drink?"

The Saint leaned back and turned his face away slightly as the water poured out of the uptilted bottle and slopped over his neck and chest.

"Chees, boss!" Hoppy peered at the Saint's face. "Didja get any?"

"All I need. Wipe my face."

Hoppy reached about vaguely for a non-existent towel. Then he seized the Saint's dressing gown, draped over the edge of the ring apron, and used it to wipe the moisture from Simon's face and body.

"Hoppy," said the Saint in a low voice, as his faithful disciple started to fan him with the robe. "Hoppy, listen."

"Yeah, boss?"

"This is important," Simon said quickly. "Keep the cork in that water bottle—understand? Don't let anyone try to empty the water that's left in it. Do you get that, Hoppy?"

Hoppy nodded foggily.

"Yeah, b-but—"

"Hold on to that bottle!" Simon said urgently, obsessed with the nightmare problem of impressing a course of action on Mr. Uniatz's reflexes beoynd any possibility of confusion. "Don't let it get away from you. I want it after the fight.

"Put it in your pocket, or in that robe and keep it under your arm. Don't drink out of it, whatever you do. If anyone tries to spill it or break it, grab him and hold on to him! Is that clear?"

"Sure, but I don't get it, boss."

The warning whistle blew its shrill alarm, and Simon sprang to his feet as Hoppy ducked out of the ring, taking the stool with him.

The bell clanged and the Saint moved out. He could only hope that his hunch was right, that he had really penetrated the mundane secret of Doc Spangler's psycho-hypnotic technique.

If he guessed wrong, there might still be unpleasant surprises in store. He was answering a gambit of whose ultimate denouement he was not at all certain.

Now the Saint opened up. He darted in with the effortless speed and cold-eyed ferocity of a jungle cat, his lithe body moving in a fierce harmony of scientific destruction, his shoulders flinging a shower of straight javelin-like blows, striving to penetrate the fortress wall of wrists, arms, and gloves that guarded the Angel's head.

Bilinski began to give ground, crouching lower and lower beneath the onslaught. Suddenly the Saint changed his mode of attack, his fists winging up in a series of stinging uppercuts.

One of them managed to catch the Angel on his nominal forehead, jarring his head back momentarily. Almost simultaneously with the first blow, another crashed though the Angel's guard and left the little bulb of nose a bloody splotch.

Bilinski began to give ground faster, the first glimmer of real fear in his dull little eyes. But still he refused to retaliate. He went on catching the Saint's blows on his arms, gloves, shoulders,

elbows, rolling instinctively with every one that he caught, like the battle-conditioned veteran he indisputably was.

As he felt the ropes touch his back, he leaned against them and bounded forward again, taking advantage of their spring, hurling his gross tonnage against the Saint and flinging his arms about him once again, shuffling around so that the Saint's back was to the ropes instead. Inexorably he pushed Simon backwards against the r u b b e r i z e d strands.

Pat was on her feet, jumping up and down.

"Get away from him, Simon!" she screamed. "Get away from him!"

"Aw, sit down!" Fernack blasted at her. He cupped his hands about his mouth and yelled, "Knock him kicking, Angel! Hit him one for me! For Fernack!"

PAT turned on him furiously.

"Yes," she shouted, "for poor feeble Fernack," and brought a flailing hand down on the top of the detective's derby, jamming it down over his eyes.

A localized area of laughter was swallowed in a sudden earthquake as the crowd surged to its feet en masse.

The Saint was obviously in trouble. He was still against the ropes, even as Torpedo Smith had been, shaking his head as though trying to clear it, while the Angel pumped short deliberate blows into his body. They lacked concussive snap but were nevertheless sickening with the monstrous weight that lay behind them.

The Angel seemed to be trying to shake the Saint loose to give himself room for a conclusive blow. That he would succeed seemed a matter of a very brief time. The Saint was already staggering and apparently holding on blindly.

In the Saint's corner, Hoppy Uniatz, his face tortured into a mask of pleading horror, leaned over the bottom strand of the ropes, his clenched fists pounding the canvas desperately.

"Boss!" he begged, his raucous voice screeching with in the intensity of his emotion. "Boss, get away from dem ropes. Don't let him crowd ya!"

Patricia's eyes filled with frightened tears.

"Simon!" she sobbed. "Get away, get away!"

And strange things were happening to Inspector John Henry Fernack—things which, in abstract theory, he would have hooted at as fantastically impossible.

Faced with the reality of his old adversary's imminent downfall, a thing which in his heart of hearts he had long since ceased to believe possible, he found himself inexplicably on his feet, howling:

"What's the matter, Saint? You gonna let that dumb lug do that to you? Move around, Templar, move around!"

But the Saint seemed finished. He let the referee come between him and the Angel, and staggered along the ropes, apparently helpless and ripe for the knockout blow. He wondered, as he peered at the Angel with eyes that he hoped had a glazed appearance, how many more of those sickening body blows he could have taken if the referee hadn't parted them when he did.

This, the Saint knew, was the final move in his play, the all-deciding feint. It would, he hoped, open the Angel's guard sufficiently to permit a blow to the jaw. It would prove something else as well. For he knew that Bilinski's experience would have warned him against such a trick—*unless he had reason to believe that the Saint's sudden torpor was not faked, but real!*

The Angel must know perfectly well that he had struck no blow that could have dazed his opponent to that extent. Nevertheless, he was opening up more and more, as if he expected the Saint to give ground—as if, indeed, he was ready for Simon to collapse about this point. The Saint doubted that the Angel actually knew how this was being achieved. He was taking Spangler's word for it, and going on past corroborative experience.

The Saint slumped against the ropes, and not one person in the entire mob could have suspected the grim triumph

that coursed through his every nerve as the Angel charged in for the slaughter, wide open, a bone-shattering right hurtling at the Saint's jaw.

But the blow never reached its destination.

For even as the Angel started it, Simon Templar's right hand rocketed up from where it had been sagging near the floor, and landed, with the approximate velocity of an ack-ack shell and the same general concussive effect, flush on the Angel's froglike chin.

Barrel House Bilinski's feet were jolted a good three inches off the floor. When he came down again, his eyes glassy, his arms flailing loosely, he continued all the way down—down to the canvas like a mountainous mass of gelatin.

He lay there twitching slightly, and it was evident to the blindest of the now completely hysterical audience that he would continue to lie there until someone carried him away.

The Saint strolled to his neutral corner as the referee began the formality of counting out the sleeping Angel. He failed to see either Hoppy or Whitey as he leaned against the ropes, and for a moment he was puzzled.

Then, through the deafening hullaballoo, he thought he heard Hoppy's foghorn voice somewhere below. As the referee completed his toll and Mushky leaped into the ring to retrieve the Angel's carcass, Simon slipped through the ropes and into the midst of the raving ringside mob.

"Hoppy!" he called anxiously.

Through the unbroken pandemonium and the pleas of the newspaper reporters and cameramen converging upon him, he heard Hoppy again, this time more distinctly. "Boss, I got him! I got him!"

"Where are you?" Simon shouted.

"Under de ring! Dis way!"

The great pipe organ burst into *Hail the Conquering Hero Comes* as Simon peered beneath the apron and saw, silhouetted against the supporting joists, Mr. Uniatz holding down a set of kicking arms and legs by the simple expedient of sitting on the body that sprouted them.

"He gives me an argument when I don't let him spill out de bottle," Hoppy explained in stentorian confidence. "So I do like ya tell me."

"Bring him out," said the Saint.

Several score spectators crowded around, seething with excitement, while the photographers, frustrated in their efforts to get the Saint back in the ring, aimed their cameras at him crouched under the apron. Their flash bulbs went off in broadsides as Hoppy wrestled with his quarry.

The blue uniforms of policemen were converging on the spot, and over the pealing of the organ Simon heard the brassy tones of another familiar voice approaching.

"One side. Get outta the way! One side! What's going on here?" Inspector Fernack trumpeted as he fought his way through the crowd.

Hoppy finally dragged out his kicking captive by the collar of its turtle-neck sweater.

"He tried to pull dis rod on me!" he said, and handed the gun to Simon. He yanked the man to his feet, as Fernack broke through the final barrier of humanity, "Stand up, youse!"

AS THE Saint had expected, it was Whitey Mullins.

"What goes on here?" Fernack demanded.

Simon handed him the gun.

"Take this, John Henry. I've got a slug I dug out of a pawn shop doorframe that I think will fit it. And I'll give you odds that the bullet that laid out Steve Nelson will also fit Whitey's gun."

Simon and Patricia were in Steve Nelson's hospital room next morning when Inspector Fernack arrived. Connie Grady was also there, accompanied by a subdued and sympathetic Michael. Mr. Uniatz was also present, accompanied by a breakfast bottle of bourbon. It was like Old Home Week.

"I hear you're doing fine, Champ," Fernack said. "How soon is Grady go-

ing to match you with the Saint?"

"From what I heard on the radio," Nelson answered, "maybe it's a good thing I'm retiring."

Connie squeezed his hand.

"If you'd like to tell me more about this," Fernack said, with as close to a tone of respect as he had ever used in speaking to the Saint, "I'd be willing to listen. We picked up Spangler last night, by the way. He was just packing for a trip."

"Congratulations, John Henry," Simon grinned. "Never let it be said that the Police Department lets lawns grow under its feet."

Fernack grimaced. "What I want to know," he said, "is how you figured Whitey was working with Spangler."

"Well—" the Saint began thoughtfully, "it was the way Whitey kept plugging his hatred for Spangler that first made me suspicious. Then later, when we were at Spangler's place and found Whitey apparently wounded by Karl's bullet, I noticed that the blood on his scalp had already begun to mat.

"He couldn't have been shot by the bullet we'd just heard fired—which he claimed. It takes a little longer than that for blood to clot.

"I realized then and there that he'd actually been grazed by the bullet Hoppy sent through the rear window of the car he and Karl and Slim had used when they shot up the pawn shop.

"Probably, when they realized I was in the house, Spangler had Karl fire into the wall to make it appear that he was the one who'd shot Whitey—thus concealing the fact that Whitey had been one of the gunmen, and prolonging his usefulness as Steve's manager."

"If he was Spangler's inside man," pondered Fernack, "Whitey must've seconded *all* of the Angel's opponents. We'll check on that."

"I've already done that. Quite a while ago. And Whitey *did* second the Angel's opponents. Every one of them. That's how the Barrel always rolled them out inside of two rounds . . . I felt pretty sure that Whitey must've been doping the Angel's opponents—if he was tied up with Spangler as I suspected.

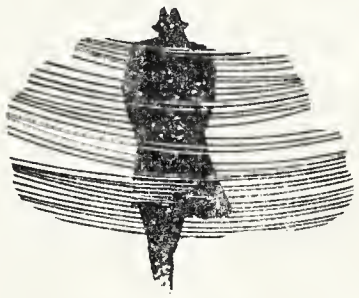
"It would be easy for him to fix up his fighters' water with a few drops of something, and Spangler would know what to prescribe that wouldn't show up in case of accidents."

"Okay," Fernack agreed, "but if it was only knockout drops, what killed Torpedo Smith?"

"Why, you saw it yourself. The Angel hit him when Smith was already half asleep. And believe me, Brother Bilinski can really hit when he has lots of time. I know!"

"Darling," Patricia said, "you won't be permanently injured, will you?"

"I hope not," said the Saint.



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THE DARK HOUR

BY EDWARD RONNS

A body lay on the stairs and furtive footsteps moved down the dark hallway toward Linda's door—then the doorknob turned like a thing alive, and stark terror engulfed her!

She brought the poker down on the dark, thin head with all her strength

LINDA stood in the kitchen doorway, unable to advance or retreat. Outside, the windows were already dark, but the big globe in the ceiling shed brilliance all around her. She looked across the room at the young man leaning against the cabinets, near the glittering aluminum sink, and she took a deep breath. A milky blue marble rolled across the waxed floor with a little whispering sound and touched the toe of her alligator shoe and stopped rolling.

"Put it down, Perry," she said.

"Why should I?" Perry asked.

"You're not supposed to have it. Put that knife away."

It was quiet in the kitchen. It was a

big kitchen, in a big house, and the only sound was that of her breathing and the clink of more marbles in Perry's left hand. He held the big kitchen knife in his right hand, the hardwood handle clenched in his fist. He was grinning at her.

"Nosy, aren't you?" he said.

"I'm just doing my job, Perry."

"You're always snooping around after me."

"I'm not, really," she said. "But you must do as you're told."

"And what if I don't?"

"I'll have to tell Mr. Blake," Linda said.

"Yeah," Perry said flatly.

"I don't like to tell him anything about you, Perry. But you were told distinctly to stop playing with these kitchen knives. You're apt to hurt yourself."

"Or somebody else," he said meaningfully, and suddenly he giggled and flicked a marble out of his left hand at her. The marble, red and white, spun through the air and hit the porcelain table that stood between them and bounced to the floor with a sharp, clicking sound.

Linda didn't flinch, nor did she move at all.

THIS was the very limit, she thought, the absolute end to her patience, her strength, her courage to continue. The job wasn't worth it. No position was worth it, no matter how welcome the extra income was.

As a grade-school teacher, trying to make ends meet on an inadequate salary, the summer employment with Mr. Harley Wentworth Blake had seemed utterly attractive, with no flaws, nothing to mar the ideal combination of spending her summer in a millionaire's summer home in Maine and earning enough as governess to see her happily through the rest of the year.

But Mr. Harley Wentworth Blake had failed to tell her about his seventeen-year-old son, Perry. Perry and his marbles. Perry and his penchant for knives and for killing things—birds, squirrels, anything. Perry who had been kicked out of one expensive military academy after another as incorrigible.

The little twins, Babs and Bobby, were all right. They were little angels, aged eight, who took to Linda Moore like a couple of ducklings to water. Tutoring them was pleasant, and there was plenty of time during the day for her to take advantage of the beach, the float, and the sailboat in the cove below the big house.

But they hadn't told her about Perry. She looked at him across the kitchen and at the sharp knife that was in his hand.

"Unless you obey me, Perry," she said quietly, "I'll have to tell Hugo."

"You kind of like my handsome cousin, don't you?"

Linda ignored his question. "Put away the knife," she said.

"You stuck on him, baby?"

"Perry—"

"He ain't inheriting anything from my old man," Perry persisted. "I'm getting it all. There ain't any use your making a play for Hugo. He's out in the cold, the stuffed shirt! You can bet I'll kick him out fast enough, once I get my old man's dough. But I'd keep you around, babe. You bet I would."

"You're talking nonsense, Perry."

"Oh, I ain't so dumb," Perry said. "I ain't as dumb as they say I am."

She had to make an effort to stand there and face him with the knife in his hand. She tried to stare down the smirk on his dark, warped little face. She thought of the dark, warped little mind ruling that wiry, adolescent body and she shuddered inwardly. His eyes were too wise as they touched her body, smirking, amusing himself. Once he had told her that he liked trim blondes who were over twenty-one, even if they were school teachers. The same look was in his eyes then.

She didn't dare glance away from him. It was a question of establishing supremacy, but it was like trying to control quicksilver that slipped away from under your fingers, this attempt to control Perry.

"You're afraid of me, babe," Perry said.

"Don't be foolish," she said.

"You're scared. But I'd be nice to you."

He took a step toward her, rattling the marbles in his left hand, still holding the knife in his fist. She wondered why the house was so quiet. She could hear the muted thunder of the night surf on the beach beyond the windows, and the whirring of the electric clock on the kitchen wall. But there was no sound from anyone else in the house with her. Yet she knew the twins were upstairs, tucked in bed, and Mr. Blake was also upstairs, in his study.

She tried to remember if she had seen Hugo after dinner, but she couldn't remember anything. The light winked on the knife in Perry's hand and drove everything out of her mind except a quick, unreasoning, breathless fear.

IT WAS at this moment the pantry door opened and Eva and Carl came in together from the outer darkness. Eva was the cook, Carl the chauffeur for the Blake establishment. The woman was a big, flamboyant redhead in her late thirties, with a puffy complexion hidden under lacquered makeup. The man was big, with muscular, meaty shoulders and a long head, the dark hair of which was brushed sleekly against the flat sides of his skull.

They were both wearing outdoor clothes, and carrying paper bundles. Carl carried a cheap cardboard suitcase, in addition. Neither was in uniform.

Perry Blake turned and gave them his warped grin.

"Hail and farewell. I hear Miss Nosy fired you."

"Shut up, you little rat!" Eva said.

"You want your marbles knocked down your throat?" Carl said. He looked at the knife in the boy's hand. Perry's knuckles were white. "What are you going to slice up next, screwball?"

"The school teacher," Perry said, and giggled.

Carl grinned. Eva didn't say anything. Her perfume was strong and sultry in the kitchen.

"Please take that knife away from him, Carl," Linda said.

"Why should I?"

"He'll hurt himself with it."

"He can cut his throat with it, for all I care," Carl said. "Eva and I don't work here any more, remember?"

"But—"

Take it away from him yourself," Carl said truculently. "You fired us, didn't you? Do your own dirty work with the brat."

"You were drinking," Linda said sharply. "You've both been stealing for the last two weeks, since you came here. It was Mr. Blake who told me to discharge you."

"After you snitched on us."

"I didn't," Linda said. "But in any case, you don't have to leave until the end of the week."

"We don't like it here any more," Eva sniffed. "Let's go, honey."

Carl leaned toward Linda. His little eyes were malignant. He weighed the suitcase lightly in his meaty hands.

"We ain't forgetting you, either," he said slowly. "I kinda liked it here. We lost the job on account of you, and I won't forget that, not for a long time."

"Are you threatening me?" Linda asked quietly.

"You can call it what you like," Carl said.

"Aw, let's go, Carl," Eva said impatiently.

The big man grunted and went out the kitchen door without a backward glance. The redheaded woman twisted her scarlet mouth as she glanced at Perry, and hurried out after Carl. Perry giggled.

"So they're gone," he said.

Linda faced him across the kitchen, alone again. Perry whistled, tossed the big knife high in the air. The blade sparkled with sharp splinters of light, and Perry caught it by the handle as it came down. He was three steps closer to Linda when he stopped moving. He hitched up his slacks under his scrawny chest and smirked. His thin face looked

sallow in the glare of light.

Linda took a step backward, away from the knife.

Someone came in behind her, from the main hall in the house. For a moment she thought it was Carl, returning for something he had forgotten. She turned quickly, then felt relief surge through her in a weakening wave.

"Hello, Hugo," she said.

He was a tall young man, not quite thirty, with the dark Blake hair and a squarely planed face and thick, pleasant ropes of eyebrows. His eyes bespoke competence. It was strange to see the family resemblance between the two cousins, Hugo and Perry—and to see the differences, too. His clothing smelled of the salt air and the sea outside.

HIS blue eyes swung from Linda to Perry, who stood across the kitchen from him, the knife held half behind him now.

"Is Perry bothering you again?" he asked her quietly.

"It was Carl and Eva," Perry said quickly. "Carl's coming back tonight and—he'll slit her throat." He giggled.

"Shut up," Hugo said.

Perry said, "You can't talk to me like that! You don't belong here, anyway. What do you hang around for? You ain't getting the old man's money!"

"Shut up!" Hugo said again, this time with more vehemence. His face was pale under the tan. He looked at Linda again. "Has he been annoying you?"

"No," she said. "Forget it."

Perry snorted. "Feeling pretty good now, ain't you, baby? Now that your boy friend is back."

"I'm going to knock your teeth down your dirty throat one of these days, Perry, my boy," Hugo said quietly.

"Well, it's true, ain't it? It's true about the old man's dough, too! What you thinking of doing, Hugo? Busting open the library safe? He's only got a couple thousand in cash there."

"How do you know?" Hugo asked sharply.

Perry smirked. "I know lots, I do. I know about you two, too. I seen you necking on the beach yesterday."

Linda turned on her heel and left. She didn't want to tell Hugo to take the knife from Perry. The situation was too embarrassing. There was no telling what lies Perry might suddenly think up. She suddenly realized that her job and her reputation hung by a thread—a thread that might be snapped by a single quirk of Perry's twisted, malicious mind.

Hugo didn't follow her.

It was just nine o'clock. Turning, she walked down the wide corridor toward the broad center stairway. If it weren't for the twins and Hugo, I'd quit, she thought. It might be a good idea if she resigned, anyway. She mounted the stairs quietly, pausing on the little balcony to look back. No one was in sight. She could see the open double doors to the library, and a dim light in there.

A lamp shone down the second-floor hall ahead, softly illuminating the marine oils on the walls and the white bedroom doors. The first two doors were Hugo's and Perry's. Then came the twins' bedroom and her own, on the left side, opposite to which were Mr. Blake's rooms, including his study. There was no Mrs. Blake; she had died in an auto accident two years before. A light shone under the closed study door, and she caught the faint, rich scent of cigar smoke in the corridor.

Babs was awake when she quietly opened the door to the children's bedroom. Her big, wide eyes smiled up at Linda as the older girl bent over the dim bedside lamp.

"I want some milk," Babs said sleepily. "Some warm milk."

"You should be asleep by now," Linda whispered.

"I couldn't sleep. But Bobby sleeps any old way."

The curly blond head of the boy was just visible over the heaped-up blankets in the twin bed across the room. Linda listened to his quiet breathing, then nodded, touched her fingers to her lips for Babs, opened the window on the little iron balcony, and breathed deeply of the cool sea wind that swept in over

the lawn from the lip of the bluff. The dull boom and crash of breakers on the beach filled the dark night outside.

"I'll get your milk," she whispered to Barbara.

SHE closed the door quietly and hesitated in the hall, looking at Mr. Blake's room. The cigar smoke was as strong as before. It was regrettable, of course, but there was no choice—she would have to resign. She couldn't go on, with Perry acting up, with the cook and chauffeur quitting, and the whole burden of running the house on her shoulders. She hated to give up the twins and the summer in Maine. But not even Hugo could persuade her to stay.

She crossed the hall and tapped softly on the door.

"It's Miss Moore," she said quietly.

An impatient crackling of papers came through the door.

"I don't wish to be disturbed."

"It's quite important, Mr. Blake."

"Hang it all!" The man was plainly annoyed. "We'll discuss it in the morning!"

Papers crackled again, and there was silence. She lifted her hand to knock again, then let it drop limply to her side. Morning would be good enough. Perhaps she would feel differently about it herself, in the warm sunlight, playing with the twins, perhaps swimming with Hugo. After all, nothing serious had actually happened. And there were plenty of other cooks and chauffeurs to be had. She turned down the hall and went downstairs again.

The clink of glass came from the open library doors. Linda swung around the stairs and walked quietly into the big room. A Chinese lamp in a jade base cast a soft light on the oaken library table, the leather-bound books, the Van Gogh over the dark fireplace. A big wing chair was drawn up near the bay window, and an octagonal coffee table stood next to the chair, supporting a cut-glass decanter of rye. Someone's hand reached from behind the chair and picked up the decanter.

"Hugo?" she asked softly.

Perry poked his thin head around the back of the chair. His grin was sly and warped.

"Hello, beautiful. Been squealing to the old man?"

"What are you doing with that liquor?" she demanded.

"Drinking it," he said. "Have a snort?" He stood up, thin and gangling, his adolescent face dark and flushed. His yellow sport shirt was open at the collar. He had been drinking straight from the decanter. The thumb of his left hand made a flicking gesture, and a marble spun through the air toward her. She caught it before it struck her body.

He laughed. "Hugo ain't here, babe."

"Where has he gone?"

"To town. Maybe you don't appeal to him, honey. But you appeal to me. You sure do."

His little eyes were malignantly amused. Again she felt out of her depth, poorly equipped to handle the boy. She turned her back to him and left the room. Her spine tingled, expecting to feel the tap of a marble flicked at her. Nothing happened.

In the kitchen she warmed some milk in a pan and poured it into a tall glass, wrapping a paper napkin around the base of the glass. An odd impulse caused her to put aside the milk and cross toward the cupboards, where the large knives were hung in their racks. She counted them quickly, but there was no need to count them, as she saw at a glance that one of the wooden slots was empty. The same knife that Perry had been toying with before was missing again.

A queer, nervous thrill touched the nape of her neck. She returned to the library, carrying the warm milk. But the library was empty, with no sign of Perry. Nothing but three marbles, little blood-red spheres, winking like eyes on the soft, dark carpet.

Perry wasn't upstairs, either. She took the milk in to Babs, but didn't wait until the child drank it. Bobby was still sound asleep. She closed the door soft-

ly, looked toward Hugo's room, and shrugged. Mr. Blake's door was still shut fast. No sound came from it now. Quickly she went into her own room, locked the door, put the key on the bedside table, and went to bed.

From far below the open bedroom window came the angry snarl and crash of the Atlantic surf.

LINDA wasn't sure how long she slept, or just what awakened her. She sat up all at once in the darkness, shivering without reason. The bedroom window was open, and the sea wind poured into the dark room from the deeper darkness outside, laden with the scent of seaweed and ozone.

A thumping sound came from somewhere inside the house. Linda listened sharply, straining her senses. She drew the covers to her throat, then dropped them and slid her long legs over the edge of the bed, her toes seeking her slippers. At the same time, she reached for the bedlamp with fumbling fingers.

There was no sound from the adjacent twins' bedroom. There was no repetition of the thumping noise. An uneasy quiet returned to the house, except for the mutter of the wind and the surf.

Her fingers found the bedside lamp and twisted the button switch. It clicked futilely. Nothing happened. She turned it again, and once more. The clicks sounded loud in the darkness. The lamp wouldn't work.

For a moment she considered returning to bed, to the soft, warm security of the covers. Then a queer clicking came from beyond the door and she stiffened, listening. The clicks ended. She reached for her terry-cloth robe and slid into it, standing up in the darkness. It wouldn't do any harm to check on the twins.

She used her cigarette lighter, holding the tiny flame aloft. It flickered in the wind as she glanced at her clock on the table. It was two-thirty in the morning. Shielding the little flame, she crossed the bedroom and tried the wall switch. That, too, was useless. Evidently the lights were out all over the house.

There could be no thought of returning to sleep now. Babs was accustomed to sleeping with the dim night lamp in the twins' bedroom, and if she awakened in the darkness she would be terrified. It was up to her to find the fuses and replace the faulty one.

The door key felt cold and slippery when she turned it and stepped into the hall. The draught caused by the open door snuffed out the lighter flame with an abrupt hand. She spun the wheel quickly, the tiny sparks dazzling in the darkness of the hall, and felt quick relief as the wick caught. The flame appeared like a tiny bomb. The little light was lost in the shadows that surrounded her. She moved quickly toward Hugo's room.

His door was closed. She rapped softly.

"Hugo?" she whispered.

There was no answer. She rapped again, a little harder this time. The wick on her lighter sputtered, then steadied again.

"Hugo!" she called again, louder now.

There was still no answer. She was suddenly conscious of appearances, of herself standing in nightgown and robe outside his room, at that hour. That it even occurred to her, she thought angrily, was again due to Perry. His thoughts had spread like slow, ugly poison throughout the entire house.

She turned to stare across the dark hallway toward Perry Blake's room. She could see nothing beyond the minute radius of the lighter. The little flame was utterly inadequate against the pressure of darkness around her. But she could see enough: the white of the stairs and the rail of the little balcony at the head of the stairway, and the white of Perry's door.

It was standing ajar.

She saw something else—a shadow, moving in the shadows crowding the opposite end of the hall. She sensed the movement of it rather than the form itself, and she turned sharply that way,

holding the lighter higher in her hand to dispel the gloom around her. The shadow didn't move. It seemed to be standing there, watching her soundlessly, with eyes that weren't eyes, but just darker patches of darkness in its shapeless form.

"Perry?" she whispered. The words seemed to scrape in her throat. "Is that you, Perry?"

THE shadows were just shadows. Nothing happened. Hugo's door remained tightly shut. It occurred to her that Hugo might not even be at home, that he might still be in town.

She backed away toward the stairs. She wondered if she should awaken Mr. Blake. But the shadows were thickest at his end of the hall, and the lighter flame seemed so inadequate.

She was imagining things. She was allowing herself to become overwrought for childish reasons, yielding to childish fears. It was the combination of things that evening which had filled her with apprehension—Perry, and the queer, threatening attitude of Carl and Eva, and the sounds she had heard, which could have been ordinary night sounds of the house and the wind. She was being foolish. There was no one at the end of the hall. No one lurking in the shadows.

The thing to do, she told herself with fierce resolve, was to go downstairs and find a candle in the kitchen and fix the fuses down there. She wouldn't have to go into the cellar. The fuse box was just beside the cupboards in the kitchen. In two minutes she would have things straightened out and be back in bed, safe and sound. The thing to do was to stop standing here while the fluid ran out of the lighter and the flame grew feebler. The thing to do was to go downstairs and fix the fuses.

She didn't move.

She became aware of perfume in the air, strong and cloying, as if a woman had recently walked in the hallway. It was Eva's perfume, and it didn't make sense. The cook had quit the house hours ago—hadn't she?

A little, sputtering sound came from the lighter. The flame was considerably smaller now. She drew a deep breath and went toward the steps. Her slipper kicked something on the floor and it skittered off the carpet to the balcony, hit the steps, and clattered down the stairway. One of Perry's eternal marbles. She listened to it bounce glassily down one step after another, then, after one particularly sharp click, it suddenly ended in silence.

Linda paused abruptly, hand on the balcony rail. There had only been half a dozen clicks. The marble had fallen less than halfway down the staircase. A queer breathlessness came up inside her. She kneeled, lowering the lighter flame to the floor. There were more of Perry's marbles at the head of the stairs, a handful of them, scattered about within the short radius of light. She picked one up with cold fingers and looked down the stair well.

The lower hall was a pool of darkness, surging up toward her like a tidal wave. She rolled the marble she had picked up toward the stairs. She heard it click once, click again, and again. Two more bounces—then a dull thump, and silence.

She followed the marble. Her heart was beating wildly inside her. One step at a time, slowly, with the little lighter sputtering lower, yielding finally to the surrounding darkness.

She saw the body before the flame went out.

It lay crumpled on the steps, blocking the way, twisted and motionless. She had time to recognize the heavy figure, the silk dressing gown, the shock of gray hair on the twisted head.

It was Mr. Harley Wentworth Blake. He was dead.

The lighter flame went out. The darkness rushed at her. It swooped in like a wave, engulfing her, and she backed up the stairs a step at a time, shivering. A rustling sound came from below, but she knew she couldn't go down there now. She couldn't go anywhere for the moment. She clung to the rail and listened to her own smoth-

ered breathing. She thought for a moment she was going to be sick. She listened to another sound, above the rasp of her breathing. A footfall behind her, in the hall.

SHE remembered the shadow she had seen before, and her heart seemed to leap into her throat. She whirled. There was nothing to see. Nothing to hear. The darkness was absolute. She backed to the wall and held her breath and listened. It came again, the sound of someone moving stealthily toward her. She wanted to scream. Terror clawed at her mind. She didn't scream. She moved her legs with a tremendous effort, sliding along the wall toward her own room.

She shivered. Someone was moving with her, not too near yet, but closer than before. *The murderer!* she thought. There was no use crying out. Who could hear her? Hugo wasn't in. Mr. Blake was dead on the stairs. The twins were only children, asleep. There was Perry—and she shuddered at the thought of him.

Her groping fingers found a doorknob and she twisted quickly, stepping backward. It was the twins' room. The door creaked ever so faintly. Instanly she swung it shut, pushing hard, turning the invisible key in the lock. Footsteps slithered with sudden purpose on the carpet, and a palpable weight was thrust against the door from outside. Something scratched faintly at the keyhole. She held her breath.

She could hear a muffled sound of exasperation, a sniffling giggle. The knob turned in her hand and she released it as if it were alive. She heard it turn all the way, and felt new pressure on the door. The simple ward lock held. She left the key in it and turned inside the room.

The open windows were faintly outlined against the night, showing her the twins' beds, one against each wall. The surf hissed and boomed far below the house. No sound came from the twins. The scratching sound stopped at the door. She shivered again, then suddenly warned by the lack of activity in the hall, she whirled and ran soundlessly through the connecting bath into her own bedroom.

A sob of fright came in her throat as she lunged for the hall door. Her shoulder cracked sharply against it, just as it was opening. The door slammed shut with a cracking sound and her fingers flew to the key, twisting it in the lock. At the same time, someone shoved with angry impatience at the door. The lock held. The door was shut tight. Again there came an angry lunge against the panel. The door shivered. It held fast. She was safe—for the moment.

She thought of the telephone downstairs, and the extension in Mr. Blake's study across the hall. It might just as well be across the ocean. At least the twins were all right. There was no other way into their room. They would be safe, as long as she could escape the murderer in the hall. She listened to his angry, muffled sounds beyond the locked door.

If she only had something to fight him with!

She looked back into the darkness of her room. Faint starlight showed the dresser, the lamp beside the bed, the window and the balcony rail beyond. Then, suddenly, she remembered the gun Hugo kept in the desk in his room. Perry had stolen it three days ago, and Hugo had caught him shooting squirrels with it. Hugo had taken it back and locked it in the desk. If she could only get to it.

There was but one way to reach Hugo's room. She turned to the tall window, drawing her robe tighter against the push of wind that poured between the blowing curtains. The wind tangled strong, cold fingers in her blonde hair as she stepped over the low sill. The balcony was very narrow, with an ornamental rail that came no higher than her knees. It was nothing more than a concrete ledge jutting from the wall of the house, just a safeguard against the dizzy drop down the bluff to the sharply pointed rocks and the angry surf below.

THE wind pushed and hauled at her as she moved toward the next window. She prayed it wasn't locked. The din of the surf was loud out here, crashing in white blossoms of foam far below her feet. Once she looked out at the black, infinite ocean, merging with the dark sky. It seemed to rise up and lean over her, ready to topple and crush her with its black weight.

She reached Hugo's window and grasped at the sill with a sob of terror stifled in her throat.

It wasn't locked. She pushed it up with all her strength and almost fell inside. The wind pushed in with her, blowing the curtains in the warm darkness. There was a scent of pipe tobacco in the unfamiliar room. She looked toward the hall door, then closed the window to shut off the sound of the sea. Immediately she heard the shuffle of footsteps out in the corridor.

She went to the door and tested the key. It was locked. The steps outside veered from her own door to this one. An angry hand shook the knob. She shrank back a step.

"Get away!" she whispered. "Let me alone!"

A shoulder crashed against the panel. The shock seemed to go through her body.

She shrank back into the room.

"Who is it?" she called. "What do you want?"

A voice gibbered at her in a harsh, frantic whisper:

"Let me in!"

The door shuddered with another crashing blow. Linda groped across the room for Hugo's desk. It stood in a corner, she remembered, and then she also remembered that he had locked it after he put the gun away. She hoped it wasn't locked now, that she could reach that right-hand drawer and the weapon it contained.

The desk wasn't locked. Neither was the drawer. But it was empty. The gun wasn't there.

She searched frantically, but there was no gun. Not in that drawer, nor in any of the others. She turned toward the smooth bed. There was no gun under the pillow.

"Linda!"

The whisper was harsh and urgent, coming from beyond the locked door. The knob rattled angrily.

"Linda, let me in!"

She recognized the voice. "Is that you, Perry?"

"Quick, let me in!" the voice implored wildly. "Something awful's happened!"

It's a trick, she thought. And with the recognition of Perry's voice, she felt a sudden, odd change inside her. Her crazily beating heart no longer threatened to burst against her ribs. The claws of panic were eased from her mind.

In its place came a slow, deep anger, a resentment at being driven helplessly through the darkness, in terror of her life.

"Linda, Linda! Let me in!"

She went to the door and stood facing it. She wasn't trembling any more. Anger made her voice queerly calm.

"In a minute," she said quietly.

"I can't—I'm afraid! *Please!*"

She turned to the dim fireplace in the corner of Hugo's room, moving with quick, firm footsteps. No more fear, she thought.

It's only Perry. No matter what he's done, it's only Perry.

The poker felt cold and heavy in her hand when she picked it silently from the rack by the fireplace. She returned to the door with silent steps, poker in hand. The knob was rattling desperately. She turned the key with a careful hand and flattened against the dark wall beside it, her head turned toward the door.

"Come in, Perry," she said.

The knob rattled again, then the door burst open and a dark figure hurtled headlong into the room out of the black corridor, rushing in toward her, arms outstretched. She didn't hesitate. She brought the poker down on the dark, thin head with all her strength. It made a dull, thudding sound as it struck home. Perry continued his forward plunge, his knees striking the floor, his

pale, white hands out-thrust, skittering over the carpet.

HE FELL flat and didn't move.

Linda lowered the poker. She began to shiver. An odd little sound murmured in her throat. She stood by the hall door and looked out there into the darkness.

Her anger was gone. Her courage was gone, too.

Too late, she realized what had happened.

Someone else was out there in the hall, moving toward her. Another shadow in the shadows. The one that had inspired terror in Perry's voice. She knew it for what it was, now—but it was too late. Perry had been pleading with her for sanctuary. He, too, had been fleeing from the murderer in the darkness.

She turned to face the brooding shadows in the hallway.

"I know you're there," she said.

"Yeah," said a voice. "I'm here."

She couldn't see him. She wanted to scream again. She clutched the poker in her hand.

"Where is Perry?" asked the voice. "You slug him?"

"Come and find out," she said.

"I'm coming, sister. And I ain't no easy mark like Perry."

Something sounded behind the voice, an incongruous, completely mundane sound that shattered the horror of the darkness. An auto horn. It blared loudly from the driveway in front of the house, and then was silent.

Linda seemed to hear echoes in her ears. She moved quickly into the hall, away from Hugo's open door, using the sound to cover the rustle of her gown. She flattened against the opposite wall and tried to see through the darkness to the stairs, where the prowler lurked. Her hand shook, holding the poker.

She could see nothing. The auto horn blared again, sounding impatiently out of the night. Footsteps padded toward her, then halted. Linda stopped breathing.

The footsteps came on again with a swift, almost noiseless rush. Something hurtled into her shoulder, and she felt him whirl toward her.

She ducked, swinging the poker wildly, slicing through the darkness at him. She felt his hand reach for the poker, grip the robe on her shoulder, yank savagely. The cloth ripped. She tugged away, swung the poker again, heard a curse as her blow struck something solid and jarred her arm. He didn't let go.

His other hand caught at her hair and she kicked frantically, unable to cry out, twisting away from his fingers that groped for her throat.

She wasn't sure what happened, then. The dark hall was shot through with light and sound. Pinwheels of red and yellow sparks showered through her brain, and the thudding of her heart merged with that of someone's running footsteps.

Something slammed hard into her body, and she knew she was falling, going down to her knees.

She tried to stand up again, her hands groping for the wall, and the sound of scuffling shoes and struggling bodies made her stay where she was, with blackness all around her again, deeper and richer and more peaceful than before.

She knew she was fainting. . . .

The lights were on again. Hugo was bending over her, his dark hair in a loop over his forehead, a bruise on his jaw.

She heard the twins chattering excitedly from behind a closed door. There were other voices, too, that she didn't recognize.

She was in Hugo's room, on his bed, and for a moment she was grateful only for the lights, for the fact that they were working again.

"You're all right, darling," Hugo was saying. "I got back in time. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"She wasn't afraid," someone said, and it was Perry's voice. She felt quick relief that he hadn't been seriously hurt by her blow with the poker. "That baby ain't afraid of nothing," Perry reiterat-

ed. "She sure put an egg on my head, she did."

SHE looked at Hugo's anxious face. "And Mr. Blake?"

"He's not dead. He was hit from behind when he stepped out to investigate, before you did, and he slipped down the stairs and knocked himself out. He's all right."

"I thought it was Perry, at first," she said. "But it was Carl, wasn't it?"

Hugo nodded. "Carl and Eva. They kept their grudge when Uncle Harley fired them. Eva tried to warn him I was coming by blowing their auto horn outside. I guess you heard it. The two of them decided there was no sense being fired if they'd only made little pickings, so they came back tonight to clean out the library safe. He went after you because he thought you recognized him. We've got them both, anyway. The police are here already."

"What happened to your gun?" Linda asked. "I looked everywhere for it and it was gone."

"I had it with me," said Hugo. "I was looking for them in town, because Perry said they'd been threatening you, and I wanted to impress on them that I wouldn't stand for anything like that with you. I missed them, but I got back here in time."

"She didn't need you," Perry jeered. His voice was respectful. "She's quite a babe. You should've seen her wallop me."

Linda sat up and looked at him. Perry's thin face was warped in a knowing smirk. There was no one besides the three of them in the room just then, although there was activity out in the hall. The police, she presumed.

"Perry," she said quietly.

"Yeah?"

"I want to be alone with Hugo for a minute."

"Oh, yeah?" he grinned. He flicked a marble at her. Linda caught it in midair and flicked it right back at him. It struck the boy's cheek with a light pat and rattled to the floor. Perry looked surprised.

"Get out of here, Perry," she said.

"Yes, ma'am," Perry said.

THE OTHER

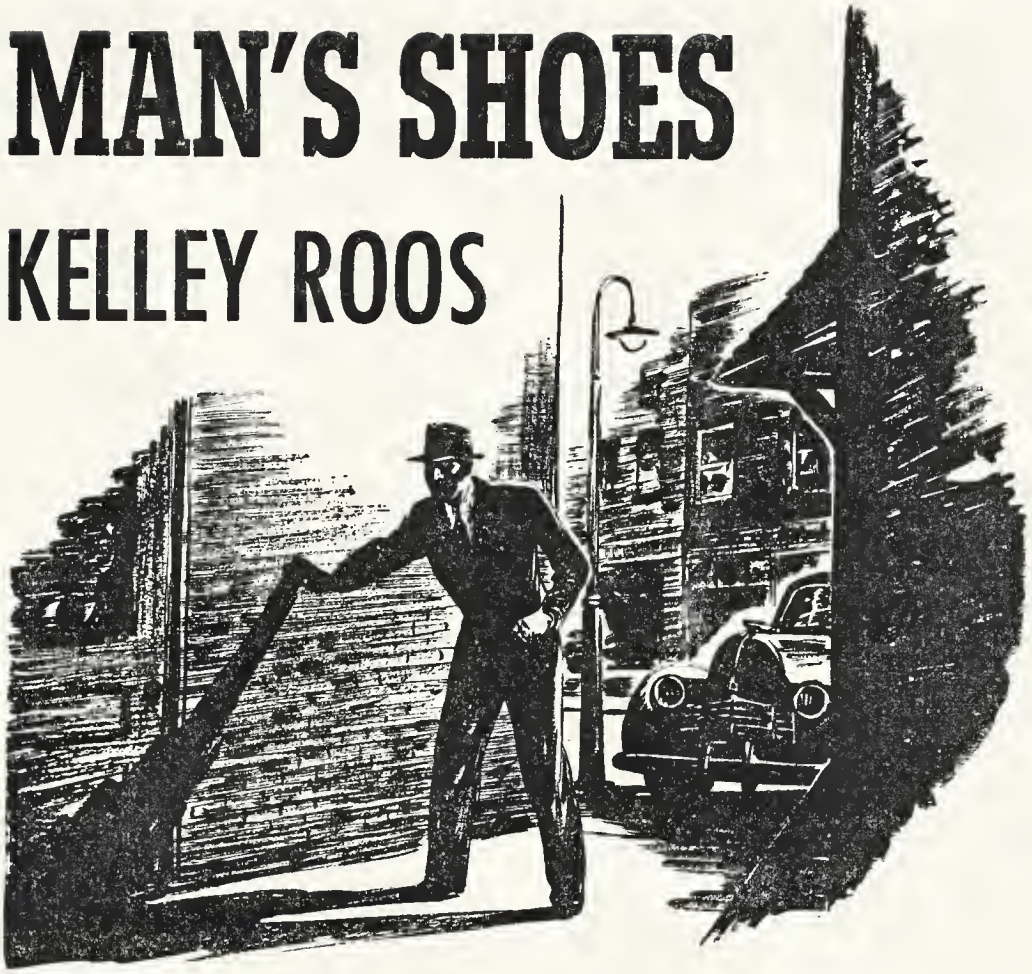
Roy Murray hides out in a small town to write a play—and finds he has adopted the identity of a man marked for murder!

A car door slammed and a man moved stealthily toward them

A Complete NOVELET

MAN'S SHOES

KELLEY ROOS



IT WAS one of the miracles of the modern world. It was the market place of the financiers, the laboratory of the scientists, the playground of the famous, the scene of the crimes of the notorious. It was the Mecca of the young American dream. Between the Yankee Stadium and the Battery, between the tip of the Empire State Building and the tiled splendor of the Lincoln Tunnel there was everything a young man needed to make him happy, wealthy and wise. Roy Murray looked out of the taxi window and smiled.

His smile filled the cab and turned the dour, harassed driver into a grinning cherub. Their eyes met in the reflector and they burst into a mutual laugh. The driver twisted in his seat and spoke in a bantering shout.

"Did your uncle leave you a million dollars?"

"No," Roy said, "he didn't."

"Your girl say yes?"

"No, not that."

"Well, it's certainly somethin'!"

"It's just that I'm leaving New York," Roy said.

"What's wrong with New York? Is there a better town? Except 'Frisco maybe. You goin' to 'Frisco?"

"I don't know where I'm going."

"Excuse me," the driver said quickly. "For being so nosy."

"Not at all," Roy said. "I really don't know where I'm going."

The cab turned off Fifth Avenue and started across Forty-fourth Street toward Grand Central Station. It was the end of a beautiful Friday afternoon

of a beautiful June.

Roy watched the smartest, best dressed, prettiest girls in the world march along, away from work. It would be quite awhile before he would see them parade again. He might miss that about New York, but not much more.

Charley Drexel, his pal and lawyer, had labeled him crazy, so he hadn't told another soul about it. Except for business reasons and to halt the possibility of his being reported missing, he wouldn't even have told Charley. He was afraid of being talked out of it. He was afraid that his escape would be nipped in the bud by the persuasive, witty tongues of his alleged friends.

It had taken all his will power to saw his way out of cafe society—but he had done it at last. His smile broadened still more as he thought of the surprise of the playboys and girls who wouldn't find him playing tonight. He laughed aloud at the thought of how well he would feel tomorrow. Tomorrow morning, wherever he was, he would start writing again—if he hadn't forgotten how to spell.

This time nothing would stop him from proving that he wasn't a one-play playwright. He had taken care of the main thing that had handcuffed him these past three years. He had got rid of his money.

Except for the five hundred dollars in his pocket, he had got rid of every remaining cent he had made from his first and only play—from the long Broadway run, the three road companies, the fabulous movie sale, the radio serial, the foreign rights. It was this stratagem of his that had made Charley Drexel groan and suggest that he see a psychiatrist. But he had been firm.

"Charley," he had said, "I'm a guy who won't work unless it's for food, clothing and shelter. As long as I have a checking account, I'll be a lazy, good-for-nothing bum."

CHARLEY had protested. "You're no bum, Roy—"

"All right, I'm idle rich and that's worse. Last week somebody called me a darling of cafe society! If my dad were alive to hear that, he'd shoot me! And, Charley, I'd load the gun for him. I'm on my way back to work, Charley, and to work I need peace and quiet, the simple life without any temptations."

"Listen," Charley said. "When the newspapers learn that you're giving your money away, you'll be ten times as famous as you are now. You'll be hounded. You'll never get any writing done!"

"I'll take care of that.. Charley, I'm going to a small town somewhere. I'll get up at five every morning, I'll take a fast walk, I'll eat a hearty breakfast and I'll be at my typewriter by seven!"

"By seven? You're dreaming, Roy! Won't you listen to reason? You can work here in New York and you don't have to throw away your money!"

"I'm not throwing it away." Roy had laughed and said, "As I told you, I'm bequeathing it. To worthy causes."

"Roy, you're crazy!"

"Be very legal, Charley. The money is in your hands. Split the stuff between The Salvation Army, the Milk Fund and those fresh air funds for kids. And give some to the Girl Scouts. A Girl Scout helped me across a street once."

Charley had shaken his head and muttered darkly, "You're crazy as a loon."

"Stop arguing, Charley. As soon as I'm settled, I'll get in touch with you. There'll probably be some papers for me to sign. So long, Charley."

"Will you please let me talk to you for ten minutes?"

"No. And do as I've told you with that money or I'll get myself a lawyer who will. So long."

He had walked out on the tough Broadway lawyer. It was when he had closed the door to Charley Drexel's office that he had started to smile. Now, after a full afternoon of continuous smiling his jaw was beginning to ache, but it was an ache that felt good.

The cab crept into the line of cars on Vanderbilt Avenue that were wait-

ing to get into Grand Central.

Roy said, "Driver, make it Pennsylvania Station instead."

"But we're here! What's wrong with Grand Central?"

"Don't misunderstand me. I'm crazy about Grand Central. But on second thought I want to put a river between me and New York."

"What's wrong with the Harlem River?"

"The Hudson is wider and deeper. Another thing, I want to go west. West is where young men should go."

"Well, you're paying the fare. If you don't have any better way to spend your money than on taxis, it's okay with me."

At Pennsylvania Station Roy consulted a time table. He ran his index finger down the list of cities and towns, from New York through Newark and Philadelphia and down toward Baltimore. He shut his eyes, moved his finger another half inch and let it rest. His eyes opened to discover that his destination was Wilmington. That was too large a town so he shut his eyes and tried again and once more he hit Wilmington. Well, if fate wanted him to go there, he'd go there. He bought a coach ticket for Wilmington.

Before the train pulled out from under the Hudson River he was thinking about his new play; he was working already. Characters began to walk around inside his head. They began to breathe and talk and live. He was too excited to sit still and went out onto the car platform where he could move his feet around and smoke.

This play would write itself, but he would go slowly. It had to be good. There were a lot of people he wanted to show a thing or two. He wasn't a flash in the pan. He was a writer.

The train turned south, rolled into Delaware and on toward Wilmington. It stopped in a small town and Roy looked up the town's main street, admiring its picturesqueness and liking its warmth. Almost too late he realized that nothing in the world was preventing him from making this his town while he wrote his play.

He scrambled for his bags and typewriter, then dashed toward the door. He was just in time. The train was already rumbling into motion as he clattered down the steps.

Roy looked at the sign on the station wall. He was in Hampton, Delaware and glad of it.

CHAPTER II

THE HOTEL, Hampton House, was as peaceful and friendly looking as the town. It might prove too expensive for Roy's new budget, but he would stay a few days until he got his bearings.

The elderly desk clerk glanced up from his New York tabloid, pushed the register toward Roy and returned avidly to his gossip column.

Roy didn't sign immediately. The clerk was obviously a man who enjoyed gossip columns, and if he was a man who remembered a name, he would know the name Roy Murray. That wouldn't do. He was going to be too busy to address women's clubs, give interviews to school editors, read the play the clerk's aunt had written and advise a dozen boys and girls not to go on the stage. Frantically, Roy searched for a name that wouldn't sound like the alias of a fleeing embezzler.

The clerk looked quizzically at him so Roy bent down and wrote George on the first empty line. In the nick of time he stopped himself from writing Washington. He thought of a cherry tree, wooden teeth, a half-dollar, Martha and then Mount Vernon.

He signed his new last name: Vernon. He was George Vernon from—from Philadelphia, Pa. That was a large town near Valley Forge.

"A room and bath," he told the clerk. "Anything will do."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Vernon," the clerk said.

He banged the bell and a boy snatched up Roy's luggage and escorted him to his room. The boy unlocked the door, opened the window, showed him which was the bathroom and which was the clothes closet and then stood at attention. Roy handed him a half-dollar.

"Don't throw that across the Potomac," Roy said.

"Huh?"

"Nothing. George Washington and me, all of a sudden we're pals."

The boy decided to grin as if he understood everything. "Anything else, Mr. Vernon?"

"No, thanks—oh, say, how big a town is this?"

"About fifteen thousand, Mr. Vernon."

"Well, for awhile it's going to be fifteen thousand and one. I'll be seeing you, kid."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Vernon."

Roy took a shower and made a ritual of washing away the dust of New York. He didn't really need a shave, but what beard he had, had sprouted in New York so he shaved it off. He also changed his suit. Roy Murray, the Manhattan wastrel, was no more. Now he was George Vernon of Philadelphia, a working man. As he knotted his tie, he beamed at himself in the mirror.

"Mr. Vernon," he said, "may I call you George?"

Now he would go out and look for a beer. George Vernon drank nothing but beer. He went to bed early and he got up early. George was the type who got ahead. In high school George had been voted The-Most-Likely-To-Succeed and in the next few months George would justify his classmates' faith in him.

Roy laughed aloud. This man Vernon was quite a character. His classmates had also voted him The Best Dancer. George was a demon on his feet, not a clumsy clod like that chap Roy Murray. Furthermore, George was a brilliant bridge player, a daring horseman, a great golfer. He was equally at ease with a high caliber rifle or a fragile tea cup. George never forgot what was trump, fell off a horse or drenched his hostess with Orange Pekoe like Roy Murray was inclined to do. Roy was proud of being George Vernon, a man of standing in his community.

He found his beer in a pleasant little bar across the street from the hotel. It was fairly crowded and the place buzzed with the chatter of tired business men and women glad that tomorrow was Saturday.

As Roy put down his empty glass, he thought that the girl had smiled at him. Then he decided he was wrong. He didn't know her. In fact, he had never seen her before. He would remember her if he had. Any man would.

ROY liked girls who were almost as tall as himself, who had long, chorus-line legs and broad shoulders and shining black hair that didn't need a twenty-eight dollar coiffure to make it breathtaking. He liked girls with wide, cool eyes that kidded you and wide, warm mouths that wouldn't stay still. Roy was sorry that it wasn't he she had smiled at.

He turned back from asking the bartender for another beer and found the girl standing beside him. She was looking directly at him, directly into his eyes and she was laughing with pleasure. She took his hand in both of hers and shook it affectionately.

"Well!" she said. "Of all people—George Vernon!"

"What!" Roy said. "Did you—?"

"George, don't you remember me? I'm Madge Pierson! Don't you dare stand there, George Vernon, and pretend you don't remember me!"

"Look," Roy said, "I'm sorry, but—"

"You *don't* remember me."

She stepped back from him. The smile left her face. She was disappointed and hurt, then she was embarrassed and annoyed.

Roy tried to shake off the shock of this incredible coincidence. Not only had he taken the name of a man this girl knew, but he looked enough like that man to be mistaken for him. Before he could think of a sensible word to say, the girl spoke and smiled again.

"It's been so long, of course, you wouldn't remember me. I'm sorry. Forgive me for barging in on you like a—"

She looked toward the door and, quickly, Roy said, "Now don't go away. The old George Vernon memory is very short. Stick around and have a drink with me, Madge. I'm sure I'll place you in a moment."

"No, you won't. And if you pretend that you do—"

"I guess," Roy broke in quickly, "you've changed a lot. But, then, haven't I changed? A little at least? Take a good look at me."

She looked at him, then laughed. "Why, George Vernon, you rascal, you haven't changed a bit. Tell me," she said seriously, "how is your sister?"

"Oh, she's fine. Fine."

"The accident didn't leave any after effects?"

"No, she's better than ever."

"That's good," Madge said. "Ellie would have hated not playing tennis and swimming. Is she still in Columbus, George?"

"Oh, yes. I don't think wild horses could drag Ellie from Columbus. She loves Columbus."

"But I see that you've left Columbus, George."

"You know me, Madge. A wanderer."

"You still drink beer, George. You were always keen about beer, weren't you?"

"You bet," Roy said. "I can never get enough beer. What will you have, Madge?"

"I really don't have time for anything," she said. "I must be going. I'm late now."

"When can I see you again, Madge?"

"Now, George, please don't be polite!"

"No, I mean it," Roy said, "I want to see more of you."

"You've been very sweet to the little girl from the old home town and you needn't do another thing." She extended her hand to him. "It's been fine, George, meeting you like this. When you write to Ellie tell her that I—"

"Listen!" Roy took her hand and pulled her back to him. "Let me see you again. And, incidentally, are you by any great good fortune a widow?"

"No, I'm not. Are you partial to widows?"

"Your husband enjoys good health, huh? Still able to get about?"

"George, you're forcing me to admit that I'm a spinster and I don't like you for it. Your manners haven't improved a bit."

"If there were more spinsters like you, Madge, there would be fewer spinsters."

SHE laughed and there was a sudden, amused gleam in her eyes.

"Why, your manners have improved! Now, really, I must run along."

"We'll have dinner," Roy suggested. "Then we'll go to a movie and afterwards we'll have a plate of ice cream. Any flavor you want, Madge."

"I don't accept presents from men who don't remember me, George." She crinkled her nose at him. "No matter what flavor."

"But I'm beginning to remember you, Madge. It's coming back to me. I can see you running around the neighborhood . . . Oh, you were a cute little tyke. Do you still hide under front porches and stick your tongue out at people? Remember the time you got your hand stuck in a milk bottle and I pulled it out for you?"

"Never in my life did I—"

"You're right, Madge. It was a thorn, wasn't it? I took a thorn out of your side. And you said—I can still hear the throb in your squeaky little voice—'Georgie Vernon, I'll do anything in the world you want me to, anytime.' Now is your chance to repay that debt, Madge. Have dinner with me."

"But I can't!"

"I wish I'd left that thorn in your side."

She laughed and said, "I'm having dinner and spending the evening with the Marions, George."

"I'll call for you. At eleven o'clock."

"The Marions live fifteen miles out on the Turnpike."

"I'll get a cab," Roy said.

"You're really insisting, aren't you, George?"

"Yes, and it isn't like me."

"Well, if you don't show up I won't blame you."

"I'll be there. Or my name isn't George Vernon."

"Don't keep the cab. I have a car. I'll give you a lift back."

"Swell! Now, listen, what will I tell the cab driver? The directions, I mean."

"He'll know where the Marions live. Everybody in this town does. So long, George."

"So long, Madge."

He watched her walk away from him; everybody in the tap room watched her as she went to the street door and passed through it. The men in the room smiled and those sitting with their wives understood very well why their mates' voices were a trifle testy when conversations resumed. Madge Pierson, George Vernon's old friend, was really something.

Roy shook his head at the wonder of the universe and its mysterious ways. The fact that he had accidentally taken the name of a man he looked like was fantastic enough. But the fact that this man had a friend who was the most beautiful, delightful, elegant young woman in the world and that she had come to him was a total miracle.

CHAPTER III

THE Turnpike weaved and twisted through low, rolling hills that stretched away into the west and became mountains. The road was so deserted that Roy wondered why. The cab driver told him that a new four-lane highway had stolen the old Turnpike's traffic and left it to be used only by the few people who still lived on it.

This was historic ground Roy was riding on and he thought of the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War. The remaining twenty-eight minutes of the half-hour trip he thought of Madge.

He paid off the driver and forced himself to walk, not run, through the large formal garden in front of the Marion's large, rambling house. He sounded the wrought-iron knocker and stepped back, straightening his tie and smoothing his hair into place like a schoolboy. He knocked again, louder this time because he had noticed the unusual quiet of the place.

No one came to the door.

Backing down the steps and moving away from the house, Roy saw that its front was completely dark. He followed the hedged-in path that circled the house. There was no light anywhere. The two-car garage was shut and locked, but he was able to see that it was empty. The Marions were not at home. He had been stood up.

No, it hadn't happened to him. It had happened to George Vernon. It was on George Vernon that Madge had played this fiendish practical joke. Despite her cordiality at the bar, she didn't like George. Or, at least she had an old score against him to pay off, some vengeance to wreak. That was far from the attitude Roy wanted Madge to have toward him. The first moment he saw her he would straighten her out, tell her that he was Roy Murray—*if* he ever saw her again.

Roy walked back to Hampton.

He had never been very good at judging distances. A mile to him had merely been something that a horse ran, or a crew rowed. Fifteen miles had been fifteen times that.

When he limped down the main street of Hampton in the bright sunlight of early morning, he knew exactly how far fifteen miles were. It was the distance between New York and San Francisco and, definitely, not as the crow flies.

Before going back to the hotel he had breakfast. He surreptitiously slipped off his shoes under the restaurant table. It wasn't until he had eaten a sirloin steak, french fries, rolls and coffee, then scrambled eggs, home fries, toast and coffee that he began to be amused.

He had told Charley Drexel that he was going to get up at five o'clock and take a long walk before breakfast. Well, he hadn't quite done that. He had taken the long walk, but he hadn't gotten up.

The desk clerk said, "Good morning, Mr. Vernon," and handed Roy his key and a letter.

In the elevator he thought that first he would take a shower, then sleep an hour or two before starting out to find Madge. Abruptly he changed his mind. Sleep could wait. Mechanically, he slit open the letter with his key and began reading. It said:

My dear, I pray this note reaches you before it is too late. I know you planned to be at Hampton House on Friday and I am writing you there in the hope that what I say will . . .

He stopped reading. Nobody knew he was at Hampton House. Nobody in the world knew that he had planned to be here—simply because he had not planned to be here.

It wasn't until the train had almost pulled out of the station that he had decided to stop in Hampton. It wasn't until he had seen the little hotel from across the street, two minutes before he had registered, that he had decided to stay at Hampton House.

Roy flipped over the single sheet of stationery. The letter was signed, "Yours, Cynthia." If he had ever known anyone named Cynthia, he didn't remember who she was or what was her last name.

"Your floor, Mr. Vernon," the elevator operator said.

Roy stepped out into the corridor. The elevator's doors slid shut. He looked at the envelope of the letter and he saw what he now expected to see. The letter was addressed to: Mr. George Vernon, Hampton House, Hampton, Delaware.

HE WALKED to his room and sat down on the edge of his bed. He needed to sit down. This, on top of his experience with Madge, couldn't happen. It couldn't, but it had.

A man whose name he had duplicated, who looked like him, was to have arrived at this hotel the same day he had. Or maybe the George Vernon the letter was meant for wasn't Madge Pierson's George. Perhaps, there was a third George Vernon. Perhaps there were a thousand George Vernons and The George Vernon Association of America was holding its bi-annual convention here in Hampton, Delaware, this second week in June.

He undressed quickly and stood under a cold shower for five minutes. Suddenly, he stepped out of the shower and hurried back into the bedroom. He fished his wallet out of his pocket and inspected his club cards, his driver's license. That reassured him. He was Roy Murray of New York City. It was nice being able to prove that to himself.

He picked up the telephone and got the desk clerk.

"Yes, Mr. Vernon?"

"Look," Roy said. "Is there another George Vernon staying here at this hotel?"

"Why, no, there isn't."

"Are you expecting another one?"

"No, sir. No other George Vernon has made any reservations with us." The clerk chuckled. "That would be quite a coincidence, wouldn't it, Mr. Vernon?"

"Wouldn't it? Thank you."

Roy hung up quickly. He didn't feel up to explaining to the clerk. He would watch the register and if a real George Vernon checked in, he would take the letter directly to him and explain to him. And he would immediately report the whole business to Madge.

Once again Roy used the telephone to speak to the desk clerk. He said, "I'm trying to get in touch with a young lady named Madge Pierson. And I wondered if by any chance you knew—"

"Miss Madge Pierson?" the clerk said. "Why she's in her room right now. At least, she was a moment ago. Four-oh-three, Mr. Vernon."

"Room four-oh-three? Here?"

"Of course. Shall I connect you?"

"No, thank you."

He walked the one flight down to Madge's room. He knocked on the door three times, affectionately. Then he remembered a certain fifteen-mile stroll he had taken and knocked three more times, brusquely. Madge opened the door.

Roy had always considered the negligée a greatly overrated article of clothing. He thought that what sports writers had done with their column-filling propaganda for Maxie Baer, the writers of fancy fiction had done for the negligée. After all, what were those things but Fifth Avenue bathrobes?

Now Madge Pierson stood before him in a green velvet negligée and he recanted to a certain extent. A negligée, a green velvet one with Madge Pierson inside it, was—well, he would wire Charley Drexel to bequeath a goodly sum of his money to any remaining descendants of the designer of the original negligée.

"Good morning," Roy gasped.

"Good morning, George!"

"You're surprised to see me, Madge—surprised that I'm back already?"

"What, George?"

Her innocent bewilderment almost convinced him that she didn't know what he was talking about. The woman was clever.

He said, "May I come in?"

"Well, yes. Do come in."

ROY walked by her and she closed the door behind him. She sat on the edge of the bed and looked at him. He sat on the low radiator beneath the window and looked at her. Madge smiled at him. Then he smiled at her.

"Sleep well?" Roy asked.

"Fine."

"Nothing on your conscience? You didn't twist and turn all night in remorse at your dreadful deed? Your feet didn't hurt for mine?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"I was at the Marions at eleven last night."

"No! You weren't!"

"Yes! I was! And since you gave me explicit instructions to dismiss my cab, I did just that. Consequently, I had to walk home. Fifteen miles."

"I don't believe you," she said. "You didn't have any intention of meeting me at the Marions. You were stringing me along at the bar. I knew what you were thinking—if ever again you saw Madge Pierson—whoever she was—that would be too soon!"

"What am I doing here now then?" Roy asked.

"You're having some more fun."

"Wait, I'm not the person who's playing jokes. It's you! Do you even know the Marions? Were you invited out there at all last night?"

"Of course! When I got back here, after meeting you, there was a message that the Marions had suddenly been called to Richmond—sickness in the family."

She glanced at the door. That was the tenth or twelfth time she had done that. Her eyes were spending as much time on that door as they were on him. Roy interrupted her.

"Has that door got something I haven't got?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you afraid your mother will walk in on us?"

"My mother is in St. Louis, darling."

"If I can walk from the Marions, your mother can walk from St. Louis. But you are expecting someone?"

"Yes, any second. I'm afraid you'd better run."

"But there's something I want to explain to you, Madge."

"Later, George. I'm a working girl and I must get dressed."

Smoothly, deftly, she kept on talking and Roy found himself out in the hall with the door closing in his face. When it was six inches from being closed, she winked at him. His answering wink brought a mock look of shock to her face and she gave the door a sudden push that made it seem a slam.

He just missed the elevator. It had delivered a middle-aged, handsome woman to this floor. Roy let her pass him, then turned to watch her. She

walked to Madge's door, knocked on it. Roy liked that—Madge's caller not being a man.

He went to his room and immediately telephoned her. She couldn't have lunch with him. She couldn't be sure just when she could see him next. Finally, she promised to telephone him as soon as she was free.

NOT until noon was Roy able to stop thinking about Madge. At one point he had almost wired Charley—wired him not to do as he had told him, that he needed his money now, that he had met somebody he wanted to spend a lot of money on.

But he made the honorable decision. He would stick to his resolution. Why, now he had more reason than ever to write that play and prove he was a man with a brilliant future.

He got to work. For awhile, as he typed the notes of the ideas that had come to his mind on the train yesterday, all the women characters were named Madge and they all wore green negligées. But then he really got going.

He had gone through the stack of hotel stationery in the small desk drawer and he was halfway through it again, using the reverse side, when it became too dark to work.

He switched on a light, thinking that a storm must be on its way to Hampton. But his watch told him the gloom was that of night. It was almost nine. He had been working steadily for nine hours. Suddenly, he felt hungry.

Later, in a restaurant near the hotel, he gave his order for dinner, then discovered he had no money with him. He explained his predicament to the waitress and she obligingly showed him a short-cut to the hotel—out through the rear exit of the restaurant and in through the back door of the hotel. In a few moments he was in his own room.

He moved the straight-backed chair out of his way, pushed it close to the desk, and went on to the closet. The fold of bills in the silver clip was where he expected it to be—in his gabardine slacks, last night's marching pants. Madge—why hadn't she called him?

Returning to the hall door, he clicked off the light. Then he clicked it on again and turned to face the room.

What, Roy wondered, had made him do that? Why was he standing here in the doorway? Why was he looking around his room? What was wrong?

Nothing was wrong. Everything was just as he had left it. His bed was still smoothly made, his suitcase was still standing on end in the corner, half-smothered with soiled linen, his typewriter was on the desk.

Suddenly he saw what it was. Yes, now everything was just as he had left it. It hadn't been before he had pushed the small chair from the center of the room back to the desk. That was where it had been when he left for dinner. While he was gone someone had moved it. Someone had been in his room!

He turned toward the hall, laughing at himself. It must have been the maid. What was wrong with him? He didn't have any nerves. He hadn't had any since that night three years ago when his play opened. Once more he turned back to the room and he was angry with himself for doing it.

Was he being silly, though? The bed hadn't been turned down, the morning paper still lay beside it on the floor, his ashtray was still littered with cigarette stubs. No hotel employee had been tidying up this room. But someone had been in it.

His money—that was in his pocket. Quickly, he crossed the room to the bureau and pulled open its top drawer. His cuff links and his pocket watch were there. Everything he had put atop the bureau was still there—everything and something more.

A note was propped up between his military hair brushes.

It was written on Hampton House stationery. It had no salutation. It opened with a sentence that used all of the first line. That sentence read: "I am taking my own life." Roy's eyes fell to the bottom of the sheet of paper. It was signed: "George Vernon."

Roy glanced toward the window. Be-

low it on the street the gears of some huge machine ground angrily and a klaxon sounded. Then it was quiet. The whole hotel seemed suddenly hushed. Roy read the note:

I am taking my own life. I have no desire nor any reason to go on living. There is no one in the world who will benefit by my death. No one wishes me dead. The few who care will understand and forgive me.

George Vernon.

He placed the piece of paper flat down on the bureau. It meant what it said. It meant that a man named George Vernon no longer wanted to live. A man named George Vernon was about to commit suicide. Or had committed suidcide. A man named George Vernon—but *he,* Roy Murray, was now George Vernon. The note was in *his room.*

CHAPTER IV

IT TOOK all his will to calm his mind and make it move slowly, logically. He was now George Vernon but he had not written the note. He was not going to commit suicide. An employee of the hotel was not going to come into this room, find his body and report to the police that George Vernon had killed himself. That was not going to happen—or *was* it?

Was he going to be found dead? If he was, it would have to be somebody else who killed him!

Think slowly, Roy shouted to himself. Think carefully. George Vernon was going to be murdered—murdered by someone who thought that he was George Vernon. Now it was clear. He was about to die—but when? It would be nice to know when.

Was somebody watching him now, waiting for a chance to kill him? No, that didn't make sense. The note wouldn't have been left where he would find it and be warned by it. It would not be left where he could see it when he walked into the room.

He had come back unexpectedly! He had left the restaurant and come in through the back of the hotel and—

The bathroom door was no longer tightly closed. Now it was standing slightly ajar. The crack was wide enough for someone to see through, to fire a gun through. Roy leaped away from the bureau and slammed himself against the wall, the wall that held the bathroom door. That was the best he could do. The hall doorway was too far away. Now the person would have to step into the bedroom in order to see him. To see him—that mustn't happen. For the man to see him was for Roy to become a target for the man's gun.

He snatched the two brushes from the top of the bureau. The first missed the light fixture in the ceiling by inches. The bathroom door moved slightly. He threw quickly again, not daring to take time to get set. The brush hit the ceiling, caromed off it and struck the globe, shattering it and wiping out the bulb.

The room was totally dark, black. Unwittingly, his murderer had done Roy a good turn. He had lowered the heavy shade over the room's one window. Roy stepped away from the wall, his eyes on the spot where the bathroom door was.

He listened. It was quiet, as quiet as it was dark. Roy started talking, talking fast.

He directed his voice to that door, to the man behind it, to the gun in the man's hand. He said, "You, there! You're making a mistake. I'm not the man you want. I look like him, I'm using the same name, but I'm not the man you're after. Do you hear me?"

There was no answer, no sound.

Roy's hand moved across his forehead and it came away wet. Did his words mean anything? Were they even being heard? Were they making any impression at all on the man behind that door?

He went on. There was nothing else to do. The only weapon he had was

words. His life depended on his getting those words across, getting them believed.

"My name isn't George Vernon. It's Roy Murray. I can prove that. I'm from New York. I'm a writer. I came here to write. I took the name of Vernon so I wouldn't be bothered by people."

He paused to listen. There was nothing to hear.

"I just happened to pick that name. I picked it out of a hat. I don't even know any George Vernon. I never knew one in my life."

Roy stopped talking. It was useless. The killer's silence told him that. The man wasn't believing him—he was saying what any man who was about to die might say in a frantic attempt to save his life. The real George Vernon might have tried this way out, might have pleaded that he was another person with another name. Roy could swear that he was Roy Murray until doom'sday and he wouldn't be believed. But he could prove it.

He spoke again. "I can show you that I'm not George Vernon. Listen to me. I'm coming to the door. I'm going to hand my wallet through to you. The cards and licenses in it will prove my real identity. You can turn on the light in there and see that I am Roy—"

Sudden knowledge hit him like a whip. It made him angry, angry with himself for standing there in the dark pleading with a man who did not have a gun. If he had, he would have turned on the light in the bathroom, thrown open the door, taken careful aim at Roy and fired. Roy stifled an urge to rush the man. There was still need for caution. There wasn't a gun, but there might be another weapon.

HE WAITED—the two of them waited—each trying to force the other to give himself away by making the first move. Then Roy realized that he had the advantage. He knew where the man was. The man couldn't be sure now where he was. That advantage would only be momentary. He would have to act while he had it.

With infinite care he moved a step toward the bathroom door. There was the crackle of glass. His foot had found a piece of the light globe. Immediately, Roy heard another sound. The whisper of moving hinges. The door had opened. The killer and he were standing not ten feet apart, face to face. He couldn't be sure—it might be the man's breathing that he heard.

He flung himself sideward, hoping to take the man's legs out from under him. Something hit him on the shoulder and he crashed into the man, groped for him and lost contact. He pulled himself up on one knee.

There was a rush of movement. Roy got set, but the movement was away from him. It was a plunging flight. There was the crash of furniture and then a short-lived panel of light as the hall door opened and slammed closed. Roy leaped toward it and sprawled headlong on the floor. When he got to it, the corridor was empty.

He switched on the lamp on the bed table just inside the door. He picked up the straight-backed chair that had been used to block his path to the corridor. He found the leather mace loaded at one end with heavy shot—the blackjack. His left arm was numb from the blow. Rubbing it, he sat down on the edge of the bed.

It was no longer amusing. He didn't mind meeting the real George Vernon's lady friends. Getting his mail was no hardship. But being George's stand-in, his double for murder, definitely had its disadvantages.

Roy tried not to think too harshly of his namesake. It might be George's fault that somebody wanted to kill him, but is wasn't his fault that the killer thought Roy Murray was he. That was Roy's fault for taking George's name, for looking like George, for coming to the hotel where George had planned to come.

George Vernon—why was he to be murdered? What did he have that somebody else wanted? Or what had he done that necessitated his death?

In other words, Roy thought, why

am I about to die?

All that he knew about Vernon was what Madge had intimated in their first talk at the bar—George was from Columbus, he had a sister Ellie, he liked beer. That wasn't much to go on. Then he remembered the letter that he opened by mistake. This time he read every word of it.

My dear:

I know you planned to be at the Hampton House by Friday evening and I am writing you there, hoping that this letter reaches you and in some small way helps you. My decision, George, is irrevocable. We have never got along together. We never will. You know that as well as I. And I fail to understand, since you do know that, why you insist that "you can not live without me."

You must snap out of it, George. These fits of desperate depression that you allow yourself to suffer are dangerous at most, and at least unhealthy. Forget about me, George. You are a young man, you are strong and talented.

You can be happy and you will be happy—but not until you get over your mania that your happiness depends on our spending our lives together. I repeat—we have proved that is impossible and now, please, George, be sensible.

Sincerely,
Cynthia.

Roy placed the letter on his knee and slowly lit a cigarette. *You can not live without me. These fits of desperate depression are dangerous.* George Vernon's state of mind was suicidal. Those words could mean nothing else.

He walked to the bureau and picked up the suicide note. He held it in one hand, the letter from Cynthia in the other. The suicide note was a forgery. There was no doubt of that. Was the letter real? Or was it, too, a forgery?

THE letter might be a part of the plot against George Vernon's life. If Vernon was discovered in this room dead, the note would prove it had been suicide. The letter would provide the motive for that suicide. Vernon could not go on living without a woman named Cynthia.

But there was something wrong there. The letter had arrived before the murder attempt had been made. If the real George Vernon had received that letter, he would have known it was a forgery. He would have been warned.

There was an explanation for that, too—and Roy didn't like it. Vernon was to have been killed last night, before the letter arrived. Roy Murray was to have been murdered last night.

Last night a girl had accosted him at a bar. He had fallen for her like a ton of bricks, just as she had planned that he would. He had asked to see her again, just as she had planned he would. Then she had tricked him into going fifteen miles out into the lonely country to an empty house. She had suggested that he dismiss his cab. Everything had happened as she planned it—except one thing. He hadn't been killed. Something had gone wrong and saved his life. Madge hadn't expected that to happen.

This morning when he had gone to her room, she had been surprised—surprised to see him still alive. Again she had tricked him. He had thought her surprise was at his calling on her, at his interest in her. Madge Pierson was one smart baby. It wasn't her fault he was still alive.

That couldn't be true—Madge mixed up in a murder plot, coolly leading the victim to his death. It couldn't be true, yet it was. Madge Pierson was as much a murderer as the man who had just fled his room. Roy reached for the telephone.

The desk clerk informed him that Miss Madge Pierson had checked out of Hampton House early in the afternoon. Whatever doubt remained in Roy's mind of her guilt dissolved with the desk clerk's statement. That she had sneaked away proved her guilt.

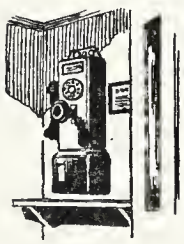
But she hadn't tried to kill him—Roy Murray. It was George Vernon she had tired to kill. But that didn't change the fact that she was a murderer.

Roy's eyes fell on the blackjack and he gingerly rubbed the circle of pain that was expanding on his arm. If it weren't for that, he wouldn't believe this thing had happened to him. He would think it a fantastic nightmare that he had been nearly murdered last night and that just a few moments ago he had again narrowly averted death.

There had been two attempts. There was no reason to believe there wouldn't be a third. Roy arose and prowled the room. What did a guy in his shoes do? No, they weren't his shoes—they were George Vernon's. What did a guy in George Vernon's shoes do? The answer was obvious: Get out of them.

But could he? If he left Hampton, he would certainly be followed, followed by someone he couldn't escape for the simple reason that he didn't know whom he was trying to elude. If he attempted to return to New York, he might be stopped. If he changed back to his own name the killer would believe he was George Vernon pretending to be Roy Murray. That was just the sort of thing a man running for his life would do.

CHAPTER V



IN DESPERATION

Roy reached for the telephone. He needed help and he knew where to get it—the place where he always got it. Within forty-five seconds he was asking the switchboard girl of a small hotel, just off Broadway in New York, to please connect him with Mr. Charles Drexel. A moment later the girl told him that Mr. Drexel was not in his room.

He glanced at his watch. It was a little early for Charley to be at home, but he would come wandering in any minute now. Roy decided to leave a message.

"Listen," he said to the girl, "the moment Mr. Drexel comes in will you tell him this? Roy Murray is in a jam. He needs Mr. Drexel. Will Mr. Drexel please get to Hampton, Delaware, as quick as he can? He's to come to the Hampton House and ask for George Vernon. Have you got that?"

The girl repeated the message to Roy and promised to keep an eye open for Charley. Roy hung up, feeling a great deal less alone. Charley would break his neck getting here and even with a broken neck there wasn't any trouble the wise old lawyer couldn't handle. Roy's sense of relief crept toward an inertia that he forced himself to smother. He shouldn't sit on his heels until Charley arrived. There must be something he could do to help himself. Yes, there was something.

His one link to the murderer was Madge Pierson. If he could find her, it would be a step in the right direction. He scooped up his hat, locked the door behind him and walked to the elevator. The elevator was a long time coming. He had time to think of the real George Vernon, more time than he needed.

George Vernon was in no danger. There was no need to worry about him. As long as the killers thought that Roy was Vernon, Vernon was as snug as the bug in the rug. It would help, though, if Vernon checked in soon. It would help if he took over being the target for a murder. Or, they could take turns. Roy would work the day shift and Vernon could work the night shift.

Roy waited until an elderly couple bought some stamps from the clerk, then he approached the desk. The clerk smiled pleasantly at him. Roy appreciated that. It was a welcome change from being slugged with a blackjack.

"Tell me," Roy said, "were you on duty when Miss Pierson checked out this afternoon?"

"Yes, I was."

"Did she leave a forwarding address?"

"No, she didn't. But perhaps I can help you." He turned back the pages of the register. "Sometimes people write their full address when they check in and perhaps . . . no, she didn't."

The clerk turned the book so Roy could see it. Behind the easy, swinging scrawl that was Madge's name was the single word 'Chicago.' That didn't help any. He said, "When did Miss Pierson arrive?"

"Yesterday afternoon," the clerk said. "Just an hour or so before you did."

"Thank you." Roy walked to the bench where two bellhops were sitting.

He said, "Did either one of you help Miss Pierson with her bags this afternoon?"

The taller of the boys said, "Yeah. I did."

"Did you get a cab for her? Or did she have her own car?"

"Her own car."

"Did you notice the license plates? What state?"

"No. I'm sorry but I didn't."

"Thanks," Roy said.

He flipped the boy a quarter and walked out of the hotel. It was a pleasant night. There was a moon, there were stars and there was a warm, gentle breeze. Couples sauntered down the main street, not wanting to go home yet. Weary fathers and mothers, longing to be home and in bed, rushed along their children. The drugstores and ice cream parlors were crammed with customers. It was a small town after the movies. Roy didn't realize that he was nervous until he found himself watching the man cross the street move toward the corner he was approaching.

THE man was perfectly innocent looking. He might have been a prosperous clothing store proprietor. Or the local traffic court judge. Or a deacon in the First Church there on the corner. But Roy watched him—watched him to make sure that he didn't follow him. He gave the man a careful going over with his eyes to see if there was any indication that he was carrying a gun or a knife.

This business was too much for him. He wasn't going to be able to find Madge Pierson. Charley would find her. Even if she had turned herself into a needle and hidden in a haystack Charley would find her. But in the mean time, until the lawyer arrived, should he go to the police?

He didn't like the idea of explaining to them that he had come to this town and taken a phony name and why. It would sound silly to them. He might even sound like a suspicious character. He didn't know what to do. He was stymied.

He was standing before an attractive, red brick building. It was the Civic Auditorium. From it issued the sound of prolonged and enthusiastic applause. He glanced at the bulletin board perched above him on the terrace.

The Hampton Choral Club had just given a performance of "Pirates of Penzance." The applause swelled as the ushers opened the big front doors and Roy watched a woman hurry down the steps toward the street. She was a middle-aged, pleasant-looking woman, beautifully dressed.

Roy turned away, started walking and then stopped. He glanced at the woman again. She had hurried past him and was now unlocking the door of a gray coupe. She meant something to him, but he didn't know what. He had seen her before. She maneuvered the coupe out of the closely-packed line of cars and sped away. He shrugged and told himself that he had probably seen her in the restaurant this evening.

He moved on down the line of taxis that were waiting for customers from the auditorium. Suddenly he spun around and ran to the first cab. He jerked open the door and flung himself inside.

He said, "Driver, follow that gray coupe!"

He had remembered where he had seen her. She was the woman who had visited Madge this morning. Madge had got rid of him, she hadn't wanted him to see the woman. Roy leaned forward and peered out through the cab's windshield. The gray coupe jumped the gun on a traffic signal and crossed the intersection while the light was still yellow.

"Hurry, driver," Roy said.

It was impossible for the woman not to have seen him in front of the auditorium. She must know that he was following her. She was running from him. Her relationship with Madge, then, concerned him—his murder. His luck had suddenly changed. Talking to this woman was the next best thing to finding Madge.

They were out of the business district of the town now. The houses were

farther apart, the lawns larger, the landscaping more intensive. The double row of huge, overhanging trees made the street an ill-lighted tunnel. Ahead the coupe was nothing but a tail light. Abruptly, it turned right and disappeared.

"I thought so," the driver told Roy. "She's headed for the Manor."

"What's that?"

"A real estate development. Pretty ritzy."

When the driver negotiated the right-hand turn the coupe was nowhere in sight. He raced a hundred yards to a landscaped traffic circle and stopped. Like spokes from a hub, five or six lanes radiated from the circle. The coupe might have darted into any one of them.

"What now, mister?"

"I don't know," Roy said.

"If you stayed here," the driver said, "You couldn't miss her. I mean she can't get out of the Manor without riding back through this circle."

"All right, I'll do that."

HE PAID off the driver. After five or ten minutes the inactivity of waiting got on his nerves. He couldn't just stand here. The woman might spend the night somewhere in the development. He started up one of the lanes, passed three houses, then heard the sound of a car behind him. It wasn't the coupe. It was a car entering the Manor from the highway. He started his search again, scanning every driveway, peering stealthily into every garage that might hold a small gray coupe.

Half an hour later, in the fourth lane he scouted, he found it. It was one of a dozen cars before a large, brightly lit house. This wasn't quite what he had expected. He stood for a moment looking at the blazing windows, listening to the radio or phonograph music that came from within it.

He wasn't sure just how to go about this. Finally, taking his dilemma by the horns, he knocked resoundingly on the front door. It was opened at once.

A pert young maid, complete with frilled apron and cap to match, ushered him into the house. She took his hat and, with a nod of her head, indicated that he was to go toward the music. He turned and saw the driver of the gray coupe.

Standing just inside the huge living room, she was smiling at him. She was delighted to see him. As he approached her, she extended a welcoming hand. She spoke to him and her voice was warm with graciousness.

"How do you do?" she said. "I'm so glad you could come, Mr.—Mr.—" Her friendly eyes pleaded with him for help.

"Vernon," Roy said. "George Vernon."

He said the name very distinctly and watched closely for its effect. It had no effect whatsoever. The woman remained a charming hostess who had momentarily forgotten the name of one of her guests.

"Mr. Vernon, of course!" she said. "Won't you have a drink? I'm sure you'll find something you like. Please have a good time!"

"Thank you," Roy said.

Her hand on his elbow had started him toward a bar set up before the fireplace at the far end of the room. He walked by small groups of people, all drinking, all talking excitedly.

The bartender grinned at him and asked what he wanted. Roy settled for a beer and got it in a chilled pewter mug. He carried it to a corner and, from there, studied the crowded room.

The woman, still at the door, had been joined by a handsome old gentleman with a shock of silver gray hair. The two of them were talking about Roy. They turned away when they saw him watching. But they kept on talking about him. Roy could tell by the furtive glances the man threw in his direction.

"And how did you like it?"

The voice was at his side and it belonged to a thin young woman with gleaming eyes in a pinched, pale face. She smiled and repeated her question.

Roy said, "I liked it fine."

"You didn't really! You agree with

me. I can tell by looking at you that you agree with me. Don't you?"

"I suppose I do," Roy said. "In a way."

"Gilbert and Sullivan are all right, of course. But there are other things!"

"Yes, there are. When you come right down to it."

"There's Ravel!"

"Where?"

"I mean, after all, there is Ravel! I've made a—what I call a 'dramusical' out of his *Bolero*. But do you think the Choral crowd will do it? No!" the thin girl cried. "No, they're hide-bound! Year after year they keep on doing the same things."

"Excuse me," Roy said.

He stepped away from the girl and went over to the bar. Standing before it, her back to him, was Madge Pierson. She was kidding the man behind it. He was laughing at her and she laughed back at him. It was all very gay and it made Roy angry. He strode toward her.

"Miss Pierson," he said.

CHAPTER VI

MADGE didn't turn immediately. She took her time. When she faced him her eyes were wide with surprise, but her lips were parted in a smile that made the surprise delighted, something that was strictly social. She's getting better with practise, Roy thought. Each time I turn out not to be dead her technique improves.

Now she was laughing, that provocative, tantalizing laugh which, before he discovered she had his murder in her mind, he had found a wonderful and exciting thing. At the moment, it merely increased his anger.

"George!" she said. "Georgie Vernon, the idea!"

"Sweetheart, you're good," Roy said.

"How dare you crash Mrs. Lindley's party!"

"In fact, you're terrific."

"Tell me, Georgie, how did you find me? Have you been following me?"

"You're better than terrific," Roy said with sharp irony. "Did anyone ever tell you that you should be in pictures? Or an actress on the stage? You're wasting your talent arranging murders."

"What did you say?"

"Stop it."

"George, what—?"

"Look, I want to be alone with you. Is there some place we can talk?"

"Why, Georgie! What will people say? You know small town gossip. If we're seen—" Roy stretched out his hand and closed it around her wrist. "Ouch!" she said and laughed. "All right, I'll go quietly."

She led him across the room, through the open french windows and out onto a terrace. He watched her look out over the garden that was foaming with flowers. He watched her look up at the moon and the stars.

She lifted her shoulders in a long sigh and said, "Isn't it lovely, George?"

"Call off your boys," Roy said.

"What? George, your incoherence tonight is positively annoying."

"You can stop this surprise business," Roy said. "It's cute, but it isn't necessary any more."

"Surprise business?"

"Last night I was supposed to have been found dead on a lonely road. Something went wrong. This morning you were surprised to see me alive. Tonight I was supposed to have been found in my room—a suicide. You and your pal muffed that, too. And now you're surprised to see me still among the living."

She shook her head. "What are you talking about?"

Roy said wearily, "Look, I'm tired and I—"

"But I don't understand! Don't you believe me?"

"No. But skip all that. What I want to tell you is this. You've got the wrong man. You're going to a lot of trouble for nothing. If you get the chair for my murder, it will be for nothing. Be-

cause I'm the wrong guy, see? I'm not George Vernon."

She was staring straight into his eyes. She said slowly, "Of course, you're not." She was smiling now. "You're Roy Murray."

"I'm—" He stopped. "Who did you say I was?"

"Roy Murray. And, Roy, you haven't changed a bit."

He turned and walked away from her. Behind him he could hear her laughing to herself as if she had just heard a wonderful joke, a joke she would remember and laugh at for years. He rubbed his hand across his forehead. He lit a cigarette and gave his mind a chance to start being of some use again. Then he came back to her.

He said, "You knew that I was Roy Murray?"

"Of course. Honestly, you have the memory of a mentally retarded duck! Do you by any chance recall having gone to a college called Allegheny?"

ROY'S face remained hard and unyielding.

"Yeah. I was there a couple of years. Go on."

"You wrote a one-act play there. It was terrible. Remember?"

"I don't remember it being terrible," Roy said.

"I was in your play."

"No. Madge Pierson—Madge—was that your name then?"

"Certainly. In your play I was the kid sister."

"No," Roy said. "The girl who played that part was a lanky, skinny thing."

"I suppose," Madge said, smiling, "that I have filled out since then."

"Yes, you have. And very nicely, too."

"Thank you. I really shouldn't have been furious with you for not remembering me. It's been almost ten years."

"But in the bar," Roy said. "You breezed in and called me George Vernon."

"I saw you arrive at the hotel and I was sure you were Roy Murray. Even after I checked the register and found that you had signed 'George Vernon,' I was sure. But if you wanted to be incognito, that was all right with me. At the bar I was certain you'd recognize me. You didn't."

"I'm sorry."

"I told you my name. It didn't mean a thing to you."

"I apologize."

"And after I made up all that stuff about George—his sister in Columbus and all that—you kept on treating me as if I were someone who thought you were George Vernon. It made me furious. I was darned if I'd tell you I was that lanky, skinny thing in your play ten years ago. A girl likes to be remembered. Especially after she gives an author an unforgettable performance."

"You've taught me a lesson. But what about last night?"

"That was the truth. The Marions were suddenly called to Richmond."

"Well, thanks. If you hadn't stood me up, if I'd been in my hotel room last night, Madge, you probably saved my life. Thanks."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I imagine I was supposed to have been killed last night. Or, rather, George Vernon was."

She didn't speak for a moment. "I thought you were using words like kill and murder and suicide, but I couldn't believe my ears. And you thought that I—that I was—"

"I'm afraid I did."

"I wish you'd tell me what it's all about."

Roy told her, told her how and why he had become George Vernon, how, of all the names in the world, he had picked the name of a man who was to be murdered. He told her about the note, the encounter with his killer.

She said, "They still think you're George Vernon!"

"How can I convince them I'm not? They won't look at my driver's license or the scar behind my left ear. They won't cooperate at all. That cutie in my room undoubtedly thought I was pretending to be Roy Murray. To outwit him."

"They'll go on trying to kill you," Madge said. "Roy, the police! I wonder if they'd believe your story? I mean, I find it hard to believe and—"

"I don't blame you."

"If you had some concrete thing to show them you might convince them."

"Right. That was my plan. I was going to find you, show you to them. But now that you've turned out to be an old school chum instead of an accomplice in murder, I'm out of luck."

"Sorry to disappoint you, Roy."

"Don't apologize. Frankly, Madge, I was beginning not to like you, for wanting me murdered. That isn't a quality I admire in young ladies."

"Roy, how can you be so calm?"

"I'm not calm," Roy said. "I'm just pretending to be in order to impress you. You should have seen me in my hotel room. But now I'm mad, and that helps some. I want to meet the guy who's gunning for me. And I think I can arrange it."

"Must you?"

"No one followed me out here. I'm sure of that. So he's lost me."

"Stay lost, Roy."

"I couldn't. Murderers always find their victims. That's their job. Listen, could you drive me into town? No, just to the edge of town. I don't want you mixed up in this."

"Roy, I'm a big girl! Let me help."

"You stay out of this. This is my murder. And don't tell Mrs. Lindley my name isn't Vernon. I don't want to explain."

"Of course not."

A LOOK of understanding flashed over Mrs. Lindley's face when she saw Madge and Roy approaching. "Oh, Mr. Vernon!" she cried. "You're a friend of Miss Pierson's! You know I just couldn't place you. My husband couldn't either."

"I'm so sorry to have barged in that way. Thank you for being so nice to me."

"Oh, you mustn't go. I think it's a fine party."

"It's a wonderful party," Roy said.

"I mean," Mrs. Lindley bubbled on, "for being so impromptu. I didn't get the idea until after the first act and I simply flew home to get things ready. I'd phoned ahead, of course, and the servants came through nobly! Please don't go, Mr. Vernon."

"I'm afraid that I must."

"Well, some other time!" She put her hand on Madge's shoulder. "Aren't I lucky, Mr. Vernon? Getting Miss Pierson to paint my portrait?"

"Oh," Roy said. "Yes, you are lucky. In my opinion, Miss Pierson is one of the best portrait painters now in business."

"Indeed, she is! And if the Marions hadn't been called to Richmond I never should have got her. So fortunate!"

Madge laughed and took Roy's arm. She said, "I'm driving George back to town, Mrs. Lindley."

Roy sat beside her in the car and felt very sorry that he was going to be busy. It was a night to be with a girl, especially a girl who had that shining black hair and the coolest eyes and warmest mouth he had ever seen. It was definitely not a night to leave a girl like that and go looking for a man who wanted to murder you. A man of that ilk deserved no consideration. Roy would break his date with him, he would see him sometime next week.

Madge said abruptly, "I'm driving you to the hotel."

"No. Let me out here."

"I insist," she said. "There must be some way I can help. Two are better than one."

"Stop the car," Roy said, "or I'll scream."

"If I stop, will you listen to me for a minute?" She pulled the car to a halt under the last tree before the broad suburban parkway became the town's main commercial street. She twisted beneath the wheel so that she was facing him. She said, "You're not sure about me, are you? You suspect anybody."

"That isn't it."

"It is, and I don't blame you. It's your life."

"I don't want you involved. Why should you get hurt? Because you and

I went to school together and you happened to run into me last night? No, Madge."

"Roy, please."

"No, Madge. Listen, when you finish here at Hampton, what do you do then?"

"I go to Provincetown. I'm due there on the fifteenth. During the summer I teach in an art school there."

"I'll be in Provincetown on the fifteenth. And nobody will be following me. Is it a date?"

"It's a date."

"So long, Madge."

"So long, Roy."

He got out of the car and walked away from it. He heard the motor start and turned to see Madge swing into a U-turn and head back for the Lindley's.

Today was the fifth of June. Ten days until the fifteenth. What were ten days? They could be less than two weeks or, if he made any mistakes, more than the rest of his life. He wouldn't make any mistakes; he would keep that date in Provincetown. That was something he didn't want to miss.

CHAPTER VII

ON HIS way back to the hotel Roy crossed the street twice. Twice he about-faced and retraced his steps. Several times he stopped and watched. No one was following him. The killer was unaware of his contact with Madge. Roy dropped that worry from his list.

The night clerk, a young man Roy hadn't seen before, was on duty behind the desk when he reached the hotel. There had been no calls for George Vernon since he had come on duty and, if there had been any before, the callers had left no message. Roy thanked him and continued on his way to his room.

The lamp on his bed table was till burning, the broken glass from the overhead light was still scattered about the floor. So far as he could tell, everything was just as he had left it. No one had been in the room.

Roy forced himself to sit down, to relax. There was something wrong with him. Suddenly he knew what it was. He was hungry. He hadn't eaten since breakfast. He would have to take care of that. The man with the designs on his life probably wasn't missing any meals. He was probably keeping fit as a fiddle. The telephone rang. Roy snatched it up.

"Hello," he said.

There was no answer. He spoke again. Then he heard the quiet click of the receiver at the other end being hung up. Roy tapped the bar until the desk clerk came onto the wire.

"Yes, Mr. Vernon?"

"Someone just called me," Roy said.

"Yes, I handled the call. Were you disconnected?"

"Yell, yes. Was it a man?"

"Yes," the clerk replied. "Perhaps he'll call back. I'm sorry, Mr. Vernon. You weren't disconnected at this end."

"Don't worry about it," Roy said. "Thanks."

"Thank you," the clerk said. "Good night, Mr. Vernon."

Roy hadn't expected it to happen quite so soon. He thought he would have a little more breathing time before the killer located him again. He had wanted to eat without a pair of eyes watching him. But maybe he could turn that to his advantage.

He splashed cold water on his face and hurried down to the lobby. The clerk was busy at the desk with a new arrival. Three or four men sat in the sleek leather chairs, smoking and reading. Not one of them paid Roy any unusual attention. After his first glance at them, Roy didn't look in their direction again. He strolled through the lobby, out onto the street.

He walked to the corner before he looked over his shoulder. The sidewalk between him and the hotel entrance was deserted. He walked back again and stepped into the lobby. Each of the men was sitting exactly where he had been before. Roy went out again, headed for

the restaurant where he had had breakfact. It was an all-night place and a big plate-glass window covered the entire front.

It was after midnight and the streets were practically empty. It would be difficult for the killer to pursue him openly. He would have to slip from doorway to doorway, from corner to corner. He would stay out of Roy's sight, never let Roy out of his.

Roy finally entered the restaurant and took a table not too close to the big window, yet not too far away from it.

He ordered without looking at the waitress and he ate without looking at his food. His eyes never left the window. It was no good. People walked by, but no one went by the restaurant twice. No one, so far as Roy could tell, was stationed outside waiting for him.

THE food was an uncomfortable lump in his stomach. It hadn't helped him any. He was suddenly angry at himself for his incompetence. Things weren't going well at all.

There must be some way of tricking the man into identifying himself. There must be some place—not a dark, dead-end alley, not a lonely country road where a man with a gun could safely use it—but some peopled place into which the killer would have to follow Roy in order not to lose him.

He was paying his check when he thought of the bowling alley on the main street. It had been open at dawn that morning. It would certainly be open now. Sprawling across the second floor of a block-long building, it had two entrances that could not be watched simultaneously. One was on the side street named Carleton, the other on the next side street. If he went into the bowling alley, his man would have to come into it, too. He felt a little bit better now about his ability to stay alive.

The Hampton Recreation Center was a streamlined masterpiece of architecture. Under soft, but sun-bright lighting, the twenty-four shining alleys looked like a jitterbug's idea of the floor of heaven.

There was a milk bar, a sandwich bar, a soft-drink bar and a liquor bar. There was low music that was a background for the triumphant cries and the frustrated wails that came from the surprisingly large number of midnight athletes. Roy walked into the bench-lined lane that divided the alleys into sets of twelve. He got into a position from which he could see the heads of both staircases.

In the next ten minutes a man and a woman came in and moved directly to the bar. A crowd of youngsters, their feet still twitching from some prom, stormed the soft-drink bar. A party of four men took over two alleys, took off their coats and rolled up their sleeves. Roy watched only the three men who had come in unaccompanied. One was eating a sandwich, another sat on a bench and watched the bowlers, the third was having a beer.

Roy let five minutes pass. Then, rising slowly, he walked toward one of the stairways. He looked nowhere but straight ahead of him. At the top of the stairs he paused and lit a cigarette. Two-thirds of the way down he stopped, turned and ran quietly back up.

It had worked. The man who had been at the liquor bar was coming hurriedly toward the stairs. He was short enough to be a jockey, wide enough to be a good fullback. His chunky body strained the seams of his sharp, overtailored clothes. The expression on his pallid face was one of weariness until he saw Roy coming toward him.

The man stopped so abruptly that he almost lost his balance. His eyes popped open, his head twisted to one side. He reacted as if he had been physically struck. Keeping his eyes from meeting Roy's, he whirled in his tracks and retreated to the bar. He stood before it, rigid, his head bent over an empty glass.

Roy walked to the end of the bar where it turned to meet the wall. From there he had a full view of the squat, square man. He watched the bartender go to him and wait for his order. He watched him take away the tall glass

and return with a shot glass and a bottle. When he drank, Roy saw that the man's hands were shaking.

In the alley nearest the bar, a bowler scored an ear-splitting strike and the man wheeled to face the crackling explosion. He slopped another drink from the bottle into his glass and gulped it down. His eyes flickered everywhere but in Roy's direction.

The other people at the bar sipped their drinks, chatting and laughing. The high school crowd's exuberance rose raucously above the music and the rumble of balls rolling along the alleys to smack into the wooden pins. An elderly man came toward Roy, asked if he would share an alley.

When Roy turned back to the little man he found himself being examined. Their eyes met. Roy grinned at him and the man reacted as if he had been struck by lightning. He spun away from the bar and fled out of the room.

HE WAS sprinting away from the main street, half a block away, when Roy reached the street. Roy raced after him. It was grotesque, inane; it was like one small boy chasing another. They ran two blocks and another and into a fourth.

Fortunately, the man's hysterical pace fell off and Roy was able to keep the distance between them from increasing. They pounded along, relentlessly, like quarter milers.

They were entering a desolate part of the town now. It seemed to be an obsolete and abandoned industrial district. They ran by crumbling walls, falling fences. Ahead of him the man scurried around a corner. Roy, gritting his teeth, pressing his hand against his pain-shot side, sprinted to the corner. It was a useless torture. The man had vanished.

Roy leaned back against the wall and fought for his breath. He became conscious of a rumbling, clanking noise. Less than fifty feet away a freight train was crossing the alleyway. He forced himself to walk the fifty feet to the track.

It was a long train—the man could not have crossed the tracks ahead of it. Somewhere in that fifty feet the little man had found shelter.

Roy started back to the corner, inspecting the wall to his left. He found a place that the man might have been able to scale. Roy's greater height made it possible for him to pull himself to the top of the wall and see what was beyond it.

He was unable to see anything until the caboose of the freight rolled by. From its light he could make out stacks of lumber, huge old boilers, then the light disappeared.

If the man was hiding in there, it would be impossible to find him. It would be dangerous even to try. But perhaps he wasn't there.

Roy lowered himself to the ground, crossed the alley and found a high board fence.

It was, in comparison with its surroundings, in good condition. Although it was too high to climb, a triple strand of barbed wire lined its top. Then, close to the center of the fence, Roy found a missing board. The man could have squeezed through there. Roy could, and did.

He was in a yard filled with waist-high weeds. Before him, silhouetted in the glow of the lights of a far-away freight yard, was an abandoned mansion—an old homestead that had been trapped by the onrush of industry and, probably, because of some freak will, had been left standing to die a slow natural death. Roy walked forward cautiously, then stopped when he thought he detected a glimmer of light in the house.

Again he started forward, and again he stopped. Could this be a trick? Was he doing exactly as he was supposed to do—walk into a dark, deserted house? No, that didn't seem likely. The man's fear at Roy's discovery of him was too real; it couldn't have been shammed. And the man would have let Roy see him go through the fence. He wouldn't have let himself get out of Roy's sight at the crucial moment.

CHAPTER VIII

A DULL light wavered and disappeared on the ground floor of the house. This time there could be no mistaking it. It was as though the door of an illuminated room had been opened and quickly closed, or as if someone had moved across Roy's vision with a light.

Cautiously, he approached the house. Then a freight train covered any noise he might make and removed the need of caution. He climbed the five steps of the back porch and found the door.

It was securely padlocked, but the bottom panel had long ago been battered in. Roy crouched, maneuvered through the hole and got inside the house. He stood up, listening and peering into the darkness. He could hear nothing but the freight train rumbling along not twenty feet away. It was impossible to see anything.

At last, he risked lighting a match. By the time it went out he had crossed the huge empty kitchen and was at the hall door in the center of the farthest wall. There he stopped and counted his matches. Only three more remained in the packet. He would have to use them wisely. One hand on each wall, pushing a foot far ahead of him before he took a step, he groped his way down the hall into the smothering blackness.

His right hand moved across some woodwork and was on the panelling of a closed door. He opened it, slipped inside the room and closed it. He would wait there until the freight had passed, until he had the advantage of hearing any noise that might be made by someone in the house.

He fought against the urge to strike a match. He had broken one from the packet and three times his hand had moved to strike it. Cursing himself for being panicky when he needed to be cool, he forced himself to save those matches. But it was impossible. There was something—some feeling, some old compulsion—that drove him to strike a light to see what was behind him in this room.

It was the little man. Completely inert, he lay on his face in a corner, as if he had been flung there. Roy dropped to his knees beside the man when the match flickered out. He grasped the man's shoulder to twist him around and through his clothes he could feel the warmth of his body.

But when he put his hand on the man's chest, he could feel no heartbeat. When he groped for the man's wrist and found it, there was no throb of pulse. Roy struck a match.

He saw two staring, distended eyes. He saw a mouth that was twisted in the tight grimace of final agony. Roy rose and moved as far away from the man as he could while his light lasted. It was something he had never before seen, something that he couldn't remain near. The man had been murdered by strangling.

The break in the kitchen door was a gray blob before him and he ducked swiftly through it. The high weeds clung to his knees and thighs as he strode through the yard. Now it was murder in the past tense. Now there would be no keeping the police out of it.

At the fence he hesitated and turned back to the house. The light was there. It held for a few seconds, then vanished. Roy broke into a run, angling back toward the house. His foot caught in a tangle of weeds and he sprawled forward. His hand hit something sharp, his head something that was heavy, solid.

HE WAS sitting up when he knew what it was all about again. His hand hurt more than his head. He pulled a jagged piece of glass out of his palm and tightly bound the wound with his handkerchief.

Getting to his feet, he looked at the house. It was completely dark. The railroad sounds in the distance accentuated the deathly stillness about him.

He saved his last match until he was in the room that was off to the right

of the hall. He lit it carefully, cupped it in his hands and lifted it above his head.

The room was empty. There was enough light for him to see that. The body of the squat, little dead man was gone.

It had been taken away.

It must still be somewhere in the house—it and the person who had strangled the life out of it. Roy turned to the door.

He was in the hall when the motor of an automobile started up. The sound came from the front of the house. His match gave out and he had trouble finding the door. He raced outside and through the broken gate in the high fence just in time to see the gray shape of the car move around the corner.

He ran a few steps, then stopped. It was no use.

Cursing himself for his inadequacy, he started back toward the center of town. Actually, it hadn't been his fault, but that didn't alter the facts. He had been within a few yards of the man who wanted George Vernon dead, who wanted him dead so much that he had murdered a hireling for endangering the completion of his plan.

If I had stayed in that room for just a few minutes, Roy thought, if I had waited a few minutes the Big Boy would have walked into my arms. It would all be over.

Now what was he supposed to do? A murder had been committed. You reported murders to the police. The police asked you where the body was and when you couldn't answer that one. . . .

What he needed was a lawyer. The lawyer he needed was Charley Drexel. Charley was tough. He had been around. By some miracle of modern transportation he might even be at the hotel now, waiting to help a client in trouble.

Ten minutes later the desk clerk of the Hampton House was shaking his head. "There have been no calls for you, Mr. Vernon."

"Look," Roy said. Then he decided he was too tired to explain. Instead he said, "Has anyone been asking for Roy Murray?"

"Roy Murray?" The clerk was puzzled but amenable. "No, nothing for anyone by that name either, Mr. Vernon."

"Thank you," Roy said and headed for the elevator.

The first thing he would do was tend to his hand. Then he would call New York again. The call might be wasted; Charley might be already on his way. But it would be nice knowing that.

He was about to nudge the dozing elevator operator when a girl's voice, low and urgent, said behind him. "Mr. Vernon?" Roy turned slowly.

The girl was frightened. Her blue eyes were wide and anxious. Her unpainted lips were trembling. Her hands were clasped tightly in front of her. Everything about the plain, drab girl before him spoke of fear.

"Mr. Vernon?" she said again, and this time the words were a prayer.

Roy hesitated. His first reaction had been to shout that he was not George Vernon, that he was Roy Murray. He stopped himself from saying it. The girl expected him to be George Vernon, needed him to be Vernon. Here, then, might be the answer to the riddle that had plagued him nearly to death.

He nodded at the girl and smiled. "Yes. Yes, I'm Vernon."

FOR a moment she swayed with sudden relief. Then words came tumbling out of her mouth. "I'm Elsa Carr. I tried to get here yesterday but I couldn't. They—they were watching me, I couldn't get away."

Her lips snapped shut and her eyes roved the lobby, searching out every corner. There was no one in it but the clerk behind his desk.

Elsa Carr touched Roy's arm. "Can we talk now? Over there? It seems safe."

She led him to a sofa, pulled him down beside her. With quick intensity, as if it were something she had to say but wanted it over with, she said, "It's silly of me to try and thank you. Nothing

can tell you how grateful I am to you. You know what this means to me and I know the risk you're taking to do it."

"It's all right," Roy assured her.

"Mr. Vernon, I—" She hesitated. Again her eyes checked the lobby, made sure that no one watched or listened. "Mr. Vernon," she said, "in your letter you didn't explain just how you could help me. What is it that you know?"

"Miss Carr," Roy said, and stopped.

"Please tell me!"

"Wait. Let's take it easy."

She went rigid. The fear shot back into her eyes. In a whisper she said again, "What is it that you know?"

"Listen to me—"

The girl stood up. She moved backward slowly, away from Roy. "You're not him," she said hoarsely. "You're one of them. You aren't Vernon."

She turned and was in the first step of a headlong, stumbling flight when Roy caught her by the wrist. He swung her back to him, held her by the shoulders. He spoke quietly, rapidly.

"Listen to me," he said. "I'm not George Vernon. But I'm not one of them. You've got to listen to me, for my sake as well as yours."

Her head was down and twisted away from him. He couldn't see her face. He didn't know if she was even hearing him tell her what had happened to him in the past day and two nights. But he went on and as he did, he felt her go limp under his hands. He steadied her and made her sit again on the sofa.

"You must believe what I've told you," he continued. "I don't know what's going on, but I do know that George Vernon is in danger. And right now, that's me. Can't you see that you've got to believe me?"

He was hardly able to hear her say, "Yes, I've got to believe you. There's nothing else."

Roy said, "You're in trouble and I'm in trouble. You tell me what it's about. Maybe we can work it out together."

"If only I could be sure that you—you aren't one of them. You might be the police and—"

"No. I'm not either of them. I'm a writer named Roy Murray. If you weren't frightened half to death you'd believe me."

"Yes," she said. She turned to face him squarely. "I'm going to trust you. If I'm wrong about you, well, I'm too tired now to care. Whatever happens to me, I'm too tired to fight it any more."

"All right," Roy said. "What is it?"

"It's pretty bad. I—I'm wanted by the police."

"Why?"

Her eyes looked straight into his. "For murder," she said. She was silent a second. Then she said softly, "I didn't do it. I wasn't even there when it happened. But I can't prove that to you. I can't prove it to anyone." Her voice rose suddenly, hysterically. "They've made it look as though I killed him! That was the way they planned it!"

CHAPTER IX

ROY put his hand on the girl's arm. "Wait a minute. You've got to get a grip on yourself or you'll crack up. Go slowly."

"Yes. You see, when I left him he was all right. I didn't know about it until the next morning. It was in the paper that he had been killed, that the police were looking for me. I ran away. Then Carl Morgan found me and I had to run away again. But Morgan found me once more—that was after my sister brought me George Vernon's letter. It said that I should meet him here and that he would help me."

"Go slowly, Elsa. I can't keep up with you."

"If Morgan didn't kill Artie, then one of his gang did. But I can't prove it! You see, that's the trouble! If the police ever get me, I'm done for."

"Elsa, did this Morgan follow you here?"

"I—I don't think so. I think I lost him before I left Philly. But that's why I didn't get here yesterday when George

Vernon's letter told me to. I couldn't shake Morgan."

"What else did the letter say?"

"Just that I should meet Vernon here. That he could help me prove I didn't kill Artie. He said that he was in some trouble, that's why I had to meet him here, secretly." She stopped. Her lip was trembling. "What should I do?"

Roy shook his head. "I don't know. If no one followed you here you're safe for the time being. We'd better sit tight a little while. I've sent for a friend—my lawyer in New York. He'll know what to do."

Her hand was digging into his arm. "This friend of yours—he won't tell the cops?"

"No," Roy said. "He'll help you. He'll help us both."

She was looking directly at him. She didn't see that the desk clerk was halfway across the lobby, moving toward them.

The clerk raised his voice. "Are you Miss Carr?"

The girl leaped to her feet and wheeled toward him. The man smiled apologetically. He said, "I didn't mean to startle you, Miss Carr. There's a phone call for you. Will you take it in the first booth?"

"Yes," she said. "I will."

The clerk moved back to the desk. Elsa Carr's voice was tense when she spoke to Roy. "That's George Vernon calling me. It has to be. He's the only one who knows I'm here."

"He's waiting to talk to you in that booth, Elsa."

"Yes, thank God. Nothing's happened to him. He's all right. I was afraid that—"

The sound she made was more a sob than a laugh. She pressed the back of her fists to her eyes. Then, half-running, she crossed the lobby to the phone booth. Roy watched her pull the glass door shut behind her. He saw her lips begin to move.

There was a scratching sound to his left. He turned toward it. A cloud of cigarette smoke floated up above the back of a tall chair. He walked to it, looked down over it.

"Hello, Madge," he said.

"Hello," she answered.

"What are you doing here?"

"Never mind. Roy, I believe that girl. I don't know why, but I do."

"So do I," Roy said. "And I know the reason. It's because she makes sense. She makes this whole thing make sense."

"How do you figure that?"

"Somehow that man she calls Morgan intercepted George Vernon's letter. His boys were waiting here to meet Vernon, to make sure he didn't spoil the plan to frame Elsa for that killing. They found a George Vernon here, too—me. At least now I know why I'm a target for murder."

"But that'll be ended soon. If that is Vernon on the phone. All of us together, Roy, we can clear this up."

"Charley will clear it up. He knows the ropes."

"Your lawyer?"

"Yes. Charles A. Drexel, the craftiest barrister on Broadway. Unless I don't know Charley, he's on his way here now. And I do know Charley."

"Roy! Here comes the girl."

ELSA CARR was stepping out of the phone booth. Her face was filled with relief, with eagerness. Then her eyes fell on Madge and alarm leaped through her and she jerked to a halt. She turned as if to go back into the booth. Then she changed her mind and, moving to a nearby bench, sat on it with her back to Roy and Madge.

Madge said, "She doesn't know what to do about me. She's giving you a chance to get rid of me."

"I'd like to get rid of you. I don't want you mixed up in whatever is going to happen."

"I'm going to talk to her."

She strode toward the girl. Following her, Roy saw Elsa Carr rise uncertainly, not knowing whether to stay or run. Then he heard Madge talking to her, telling her that she was a friend of Roy Murray's, that any friend of Roy's was a friend of hers. She talked on,

warmly, reassuringly. Roy watched the girl relax and respond to Marge's warmth.

Madge said, "Was that George Vernon on the phone?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?" Roy asked.

"He's here. He wants me to meet him right away. In a place called Tipton Lane. I'm going there now."

"I'll go with you, Elsa," Madge said.

"No," Roy said. "I'll go with her."

The girl said timidly, "I—I'd like her to go, too." She looked gratefully at Madge. Roy felt that it was important to her that Madge went, that she trusted her more fully than she did him. Elsa said, "I don't think Tipton Lane is very far."

"It isn't," Madge said. "I did some sketches near there the other day. It might have been a lane two hundred years ago. Now it's an alley. We can walk there more quickly than I could drive you. Let's go."

The click of their heels roused the clerk from his catnap and he smiled sleepily as they passed his desk. They went out into the night, turned to the left, walked past the building that housed the bowling alley, turned left again. The girl walked quickly. She was excited and strangely gay as if she had no doubt that her nightmare was about to be ended.

Except for an occasional car and a few hurrying pedestrians, the streets were deserted. They stepped down a curb and moved across the mouth of a narrow alley.

Madge said, "Here. This is it."

They stood still, peering down into Tipton Lane. No one stepped out of the darkness toward them.

Cautiously they edged into the alley, around the bent elbow in its middle and on toward the street at the far end.

A light high up in one of the buildings snapped on and they could see that Tipton Lane was hemmed by the backs of five and six-story tenements. They walked more rapidly now. At the end of the alley they stopped. There had been no one on the narrow street.

"Something's happened to him," Elsa Carr said.

"Maybe," Roy said. "But we're early. We'll walk back."

The light on the fifth floor was out now. The sound of their footsteps was the only thing that broke the quiet of the little street. Once Elsa cried out and then giggled as a frightened cat scurried across the alley in front of them.

They started forward again. Now they were beyond the elbow and Elsa was ahead of them. She stepped out of the alley onto the sidewalk of the street. For a moment she was out of their sight, then she was darting frantically toward them. She stumbled and it was Roy who kept her from falling. Panic had strangled her and the sounds she made were a hysterical jumble. Roy tightened his grip on her shoulders, shook her.

"Elsa, what is it?"

"In a car out there," she gasped, waiting . . . Morgan!"

SHE twisted out of Roy's grasp and ran toward the far end of the alley. Madge and Roy chased her. The alley suddenly lit up with the haze of reflected light. Then the motor of a car and two headlights moved around the elbow and caught them, blinding them with their brilliance. They stopped. The lights crept slowly t o w a r d them. Roy stretched out his hand and caught Elsa.

"The other way," he said.

"No!" Her voice was a hoarse whisper. "No, Morgan's there."

The lights stopped moving. They snapped off. A car door slammed and a man moved stealthily toward them. Elsa sagged at his side and Roy slipped his arm around her. He shook the glare out of his eyes. The figure that approached them was a man. The man stopped ten feet in front of them.

"Roy!" he called. "Roy, is that you?"

"Charley," Roy said. He laughed and said it again.

Charley approached them, his bulky, well-fed figure rolling from side to side as he walked. He took off the three-

dollar felt hat that he had worn all the years that Roy had known him. With the back of his other hand he wiped the top of his egg-bald head.

He said, "What is this, anyway?"

Elsa was holding tight to Roy. "Who is he?" she whispered.

Roy said, "It's all right now, Elsa. Charley—"

The girl screamed. "Listen! Can't you hear it? That's Morgan's car. He's coming this way. She seized Roy and dragged him past Charley toward Charley's sedan. "Hurry!" she cried. "Please!"

Charley said, "What's going on?"

Elsa pushed Roy into the driver's seat. Sobbing with fear, she choked out the words. "You drive. Let's get out of here."

She dove into the back of the car. Charley followed her. Madge slipped into the seat beside Roy. Roy snapped on the lights, the ignition. He got the car going and backed out of the alley. He righted the car, sent it moving toward the main street of the town. He glanced at Madge. She was watching Elsa. In the mirror Roy saw that the girl was on her knees, peering out through the rear window. Charley lit a match and held it to the end of a fat cigar.

"All this is fun," Charley said, "but what does it add up to? A guy gets a mysterious message from his favorite client, he breaks his neck getting here and the client won't talk."

"Good going, Charley," Roy said. "How did you do it?"

"Flew to Wilmington. Hired this car and drove over. Just saw you three disappear around a corner as I pulled up in front of the hotel. I lost you, but you had to be in that alley. There was no place else for you to be. Come on, Roy. Give. Introduce me to the ladies."

"I," said Madge, "am an old chum of Roy's from way back. And it was lovely meeting you in that alley, Charley."

"Some of my best friends I met in alleys," Charley said. He touched Elsa's shoulder. "Sit down, baby. Nobody's following us."

"Yes!" Elsa's voice was shrill. "I wasn't sure, but that car—yes, it *is* following!"

Roy glanced into the reflector. He could only see Elsa and Charley, who had twisted his bulk around to look out the back window.

Charley said, "Yeah, there's a car all right. Roy, make a couple turns. Give 'em the old one-two and see what happens."

CHAPTER X

NO ONE spoke until Roy had pulled off the main street, driven a block and turned again. Then Charley said, "The girlie's right, Roy. Step on it!"

Roy threw the weight of his foot on the gas pedal. The car Charley had hired in Wilmington was a good one. It kept its four wheels on the ground as Roy raced it back into the main street. He pushed it to eighty as they roared out of the town. They sped past the real estate development where the Lindleys lived, hit the open country, still going fast. Then Roy had to slow down.

Ahead of them the road split and plunged into a double-barreled tunnel. They were nearing the far mouth of the tunnel when Charley spoke.

"We've lost them."

Charley righted himself in his seat, pulled Elsa down from the window. "It's all right now, baby. You're a client of Charley Drexel's now, so your troubles are over."

Roy saw Elsa smile weakly at the lawyer and sink back exhausted in the corner of the car.

The car burst from the tunnel's mouth and flicked through its gardened plaza. A state trooper was sitting on a wall, smoking a cigarette. Roy thought of asking Charley if they could use a cop, then decided against it. Charley considered policemen adept at helping old folks and children across streets and that was all. He caught the lawyer's

eye in the mirror.

"What do we do now, Charley?"

"Keep going. We'll drive to Wilmington and establish a base there. In the meantime, how about a few salient facts?"

Roy told the story. He began with the moment of the great coincidence when he had chosen the name of George Vernon and he ended with the moment that the lights of Charley's car had pinioned them in Tipton Lane. Charley chuckled.

"Roy, Roy," he said.

"What? What's funny?"

"If you could pick horses out of a hat the way you can names of murder-bait. Look, kid, you say nobody except Madge here knows that you were Roy Murray pretending to be George Vernon?"

"That's right. And then I told Elsa a couple of hours ago. The four of us here are the only ones in the world who know. Why, Charley?"

"Quiet, please," Charley said. "Let's have a little silence. The Brain wants to function. So do not disturb."

Roy drove on and it was pleasant. He handed Madge a cigarette and put another between his lips. Madge looked to him for a match and he shook his head. She searched through her purse, then snapped open the compartment in the dashboard. She lit his cigarette, held the flame to her own, and slipped the matches back into the compartment. Roy inhaled and settled down behind the wheel. Suddenly, everything was fine with him.

Beside him was—he tried to think of a girl he would rather have beside him, and he couldn't. Behind him was Charley. That was fine, too. And Elsa Carr. Things would start looking up for her. Charley would see to that. Charley would see to everything. Yes, life was definitely turning over on its non-seamy side where it hadn't been spending much time in the past forty hours.

He glanced at Madge, started to speak, and stopped. Madge was leaning forward, staring straight before her. She was filled with a strange tension that sent a chill crinkling through him. In the glow of the dashboard light her face was strained and pale. He started to speak again and, almost imperceptibly, she shook her head.

He kept his eyes on the road and waited. He felt Madge lean back in the seat, then slide slightly toward him. He heard her heave a great sigh and say, too merrily, "Oh, what a glorious night!"

"Quiet, sweetheart," Roy said. "You'll disturb the Brain."

CHARLEY uttered a derisive laugh and said something that Roy didn't hear. All of his attention was on Madge's left hand as it stretched forward until it was beneath the bulb of the dashboard light. It stopped there.

She opened it and Roy saw a sheet of yellow paper, the size of a grocery store order blank. It was a printed form and to it pencilled writing had been added. Roy leaned forward, hunched over the wheel. Now he could read the slip of paper.

It was only a bill issued by the Crown Garage, 114 West 48th Street, New York City. It was a bill for one month's rental, 12 gallons of gas, 1 quart of oil, a cleaning job, a new windshield wiper. It was made out to C. A. Drexel. A garage bill made out to Charley—yet it made Madge's hand tremble as she held it.

He felt her nudge his thigh. Quietly she pulled down the compartment door and slipped the yellow paper into it. He glanced at her face and knew from its expression that that was all she could tell him. The rest was up to him.

He sent the facts winding slowly through his mind. Madge had found a garage bill made out to Charley in the car's compartment. Charley's garage was the Crown on West 48th Street. He knew that. The Crown people had made out Charley's monthly bill and he had tucked it into the dashboard. That was perfectly all right.

But it wasn't all right that the bill should be in this car. Charley had flown to Wilmington. In Wilmington he had rented this car. There it was!

You didn't set up housekeeping in a rented car. You didn't take bills out of your pocket and file them in a compartment of a rented car.

Roy stared at the windshield wiper. It was shining, unmistakably new and recently installed. This wasn't a rented car. It was Charley's car. And Charley had lied to him.

Why had he lied? Why had he said he had flown to Wilmington when, actually, he had driven his own car from New York to Hampton? But he couldn't have done that. It would take at least six hours to cover that distance.

Six hours. The two words burned themselves into Roy's brain. Six hours ago he had not yet sent his message to Charley. Yet sometime before that Charley had started driving to Hampton. He had set out for Hampton when it was impossible for him to know that Roy was there, pretending to be George Vernon. But he had known.

How, Roy asked himself, could he have known?

The answer to that one sent Roy's mind into a tailspin. One of two people had given Charley that information. The short, squat man who was dead now. Or the girl in the back seat, Elsa Carr. It had to be one of them. And if it was, it meant that no George Vernon was ever to have been murdered.

It was Roy Murray who was to have been killed.

He should have known that. He should have known it from the first. He had known all along that the coincidence was too great—that he had taken the name of a man marked for murder was too incredible to be true.

It wasn't true. It was he who was to die. He was to have been found dead as George Vernon. His own identification was to have been stripped from him. The hotel registry, the suicide note, the letter signed Cynthia which was still in his pocket—that would have proved he was George Vernon. The police would never link anyone to the murder of that man because there was no Vernon.

It was a plan that had been possible to set up only because he meant to take a new name, to hide out and write his play. Only one person knew that he was going to do that. He looked up into the mirror. The girl Elsa had moved over and her head was on Charley's shoulder. She was pretending to be asleep. Roy knew that Charley had been whispering to her; Charley knew that Roy had seen him doing it. He grinned at Roy, and winked.

Charley was trying to kill him. He had already strangled a man who had got in his way. But why did Charley want him dead?

He had the answer to that one, too, now. The money.

THE old lawyer had been frantic when Roy had instructed him to give it away. He had been frantic because there was no money. Charley had used it and, to avoid the discovery, Roy had to be killed. He was going to be killed any moment now. Charley needed only to extend his hand, touch the back of Roy's neck with a gun, pull the trigger.

He was chauffeuring himself to the lonely spot where he was to be murdered. The girl pretending that she was to meet George Vernon—that was a hoax to maneuver him into this spot. It was Charley she had talked to on the phone. It was she who told him that Roy had sent for him.

There was no Morgan. There had been no car at the end of the alley. No car had followed them. It had all been staged by the girl. All of it except the fright that had seized her when she stepped from the phone booth and saw him with Madge. They hadn't known about Madge then. They hadn't included her in their plans.

The relief that swept over Roy was like a wave of cold, clean water. He was safe, so long as Madge was with him. Charley couldn't kill him with Madge there. Somehow, Charley would try to separate them. Roy wouldn't let that happen. He wasn't done for yet. Between the two of them, he'd get out of this.

His relief exploded as quickly as it

had appeared. Charley's words had come back to him.

" . . . look, kid, you say nobody except Madge here knows you were Roy Murray pretending to be a George Vernon . . ."

Charley had asked him that. And he had assured Charley that no one in the world except the four people in this car knew anything about it. It was all right for the girl to know. She was in this with Charley. And it didn't matter that Madge knew it. It only meant the use of another bullet—one for the back of his head, one for Madge.

Roy turned and looked at her. She didn't move or speak. She might have been an image, a very lovely image. Then her hand crept across the seat and waited for Roy's. He took it, held it for a moment. He glanced into the mirror. Charley was smoking his cigar more rapidly. It might have been nerves; it might have been impatience to finish a job he had to do. He had already killed one man, strangled the life out of him, carted his body away.

CHAPTER XI

THE ghost of a plan formed in Roy's mind. It might work and it might not. There was no time to ponder a better one. Two things might make it work. Charley's ignorance that Roy knew the truth was one; the fact that he had already killed a man the other. Those two things and a lot of help from heaven.

He thought they would never reach a fork in the road. But finally there was one in front of them. He eased the car off the highway to Wilmington and in a moment they were rolling along at right angles to it. Charley hadn't noticed. Or had he noticed and didn't care? Was one deserted place as good as another to fire two shots?

It was heaven that helped this time. The road kept swinging to the right and only one direct turn was necessary to point the car back to the highway. Then they were on it again and Charley hadn't realized yet that they were driving away from Wilmington, back toward Hampton, back toward a tunnel where a trooper might be stationed.

Madge was leaning forward in her seat, her hands clasped tight in her lap. She knew what Roy was doing. She was rooting them home. Roy started whistling softly and she stopped peering out through the windshield. She leaned back, pretending it didn't matter how soon they got to the tunnel where the policeman might be.

He couldn't be there, he wouldn't be there. It wouldn't be his sole duty to police the tunnel, not at night when the traffic was light. But it was possible. Accidents often happened in tunnels. He had to be there.

The car rolled on. Slowly, carefully, Roy pressed his foot harder on the pedal so that Charley wouldn't sense that they were going seventy now. Suddenly Charley cupped his hands around his eyes and looked out the window.

Roy said, "Charley, do they miss me in New York? Have you been flooded with inquiries about me, Charley?"

"Yeah," Charley grunted. "Flooded."

"Did you tell them not to worry about me, Charley, that I was all right?"

Going in the opposite direction it was hard to tell how much further it was to the tunnel. It couldn't be far. The car was doing more than a mile a minute. It had been doing that for quite a few minutes. Roy said, "Charley?"

"Huh?" The lawyer was still looking out the window. "Yeah?"

"I got a good start on my play. Before all this began, I mean. Want me to tell you about it?"

"Say, are we on the right road?"

"Of course."

"You wouldn't be kidding me, would you?" Roy saw Charley's hand slip into his side pocket. He saw the girl move away, cower back into her corner. "I can take a joke, kiddo," Charley said, "but not at this time of night."

The lights of the tunnel popped into sight. Charley saw them the same time

he did. He said, "What do you think you're doing?"

The state trooper was not sitting on the wall where they had seen him. Roy took his foot off the accelerator and allowed the car to coast. It didn't matter now.

And then, suddenly he saw the trooper. He was gunning up his motorcycle. He was on the cycle and it was headed into the tunnel. Then he swerved in a semi-circle and was facing the car. He stopped and watched it come toward him.

Roy let it roll on and put his foot on the brake.

Charley spoke. His voice was normal and pleasant. "You can't prove a thing, Roy. You're going to sound very silly."

The state trooper was looking through the window, across Madge at Roy.

Roy said carefully, "There's something in the back of this car, in the luggage compartment, I'd like you to see."

Charley lunged forward. He grappled with the door handle, swung open the door. Roy was ahead of him. He hit him while he was still on the running board. Charley went limp, started to fall. The cop came around the front of the car and grabbed Charley as he scrambled to his feet. He dragged the lawyer to the back of the car, held him while Roy unlocked the compartment. In it, folded up like a jackknife, was the short, thick dead man. . . .

MADGE poured another cup of coffee for Roy. She put into it exactly the right amount of cream, precisely enough sugar. She smiled as she leaned across the table and handed it to him. He took it and he wasn't in his hotel room. He was in a small cottage by a waterfall, seventh heaven, a garden of roses.

"You transport me," he told Madge.

"Hmm?"

"You send me." He sighed. "Due to the unreliability of my ex-lawyer, I am a poor man. It may be several months before I can buy you green negligées to traipse around our house in." He sighed again. "I wish I could pick lawyers like I can negligées."

"Roy, that man Charley killed followed you from New York. At Charley's orders?"

He nodded. "The moment I decided to get rid of my money, Charley knew he had to do something drastic. His book on my finances wouldn't stand any looking into. When the little man discovered here in Hampton that I had taken the name George Vernon, he called his boss. That gave Charley his lovely, foolproof idea.

"He drove down here pronto to have me killed as a George Vernon. He picked up darling little Elsa in Philadelphia. It was she who wrote the 'Cynthia' letter for him. Sweetheart, if you hadn't sent me out to the Marions, I would have been murdered in my sleep —in that bed there. Thanks, Madge."

"And if you hadn't outwitted the little man the next night—thank you for that, Roy."

"If you hadn't discovered it was Charley's own car we were in—no, Madge, I owe my life mostly to you."

"You were driving the car, Roy. It was you who finally tricked Charley."

"Let's not argue, Madge."

"But you saved my life and I insist on showing my appreciation." Suddenly, she laughed. Then her eyes narrowed suspiciously and she said, "You know, on second thought it wasn't a Roy Murray who wrote that one-act play I was in at school. It was a boy named George Vernon."

"Now, wait!" Roy said frantically. "Don't kid me. I am Roy Murray! I can prove it. I'm sure I'm Roy Murray."

A waiter stepped into the room. He looked at Roy and said, "May I remove the table, Mr. Vernon?"

"My name's Murray!" Roy shouted.

"That so?" the waiter said. "That's my name, too. Murray, Roy Murray. And you know, there's a fellow in New York who writes plays. His name is Roy Murray, too. What's your first name, Mr. Murray?"

"George," Roy said weakly. "Call me George."

the Clue on the Shade

MARGARET PETHERBRIDGE

To find the missing words in this story, you must first work the puzzle, seeking the meaning of each word in the text of the story itself. A stands for Across, D Down

INSPECTOR CROSS was hurrying home when his attention was attracted by a huge sign on the front wall of an ancient brownstone house. The sign said (41D) FOR RENT.

Such a sign was rare enough in these days of housing shortages and undercover premiums paid to landlords. But if his shrewd (11D) had not wandered to the window beside the stoop, he would have missed an even stranger phenomenon—a great black (14A) on the shade that vanished in a second as the light in the room went on and off. It was a silhouette to (7A) even a hardened police officer—a man's elongated body hanging from the chandelier and slowly swinging back and forth.

"(24D)," said Cross to himself. "It's only my over-worked nerves playing (36D) on me. What I need is a hot drink and a good night's sleep."

It was midnight and bitterly cold. A chilling wind swooped in from the north, driving before it a wall of wet snow. Cross shivered, drew his overcoat collar up around his neck and went (29A) home. He found a place set for him at the kitchen table and immediately sat down and (50D) a good snack of hot soup and some sliced (42D). It wasn't long before a delightful feeling of ease spread through him and he found himself blessing his wife for being a (28D) of a cook.

When he had finished eating, he lingered at the table to smoke a cigarette. Then he went upstairs where he dropped off to sleep reading (46D).

At eight o'clock the next morning he was back at his desk in Police Headquarters. Oddly enough, his first telephone call was to (5D) disquieting memories of the bizarre midnight occurrence in the old brownstone house.

He picked up the receiver and an excited voice babbled into his ear.

"Police Department! My name is (23D) Way. I want to report a suicide. Come to—." The voice then gave the address of the house where the inspector had lingered just eight hours ago.

Considerably (38A) by the unexpected call, Cross sent for Sergeant Ickle. Together, they took a squad car and hurried to the scene.

Mr. Way, a nervous little man, looking like a refugee from the (6D) of Paris, was waiting for them on the stoop and very anxious to tell his story.

"I've been hunting all over the city for a room," he explained. "Early this morning I noticed the sign outside this building so I went to the door and rang the bell. An old woman (9D) my ring. She showed me the apartment on this floor and when I (49A) my neck inside the door I saw something horrible."

"What did you see?" snapped Cross.

"It was a dead man hanging from the chandelier."

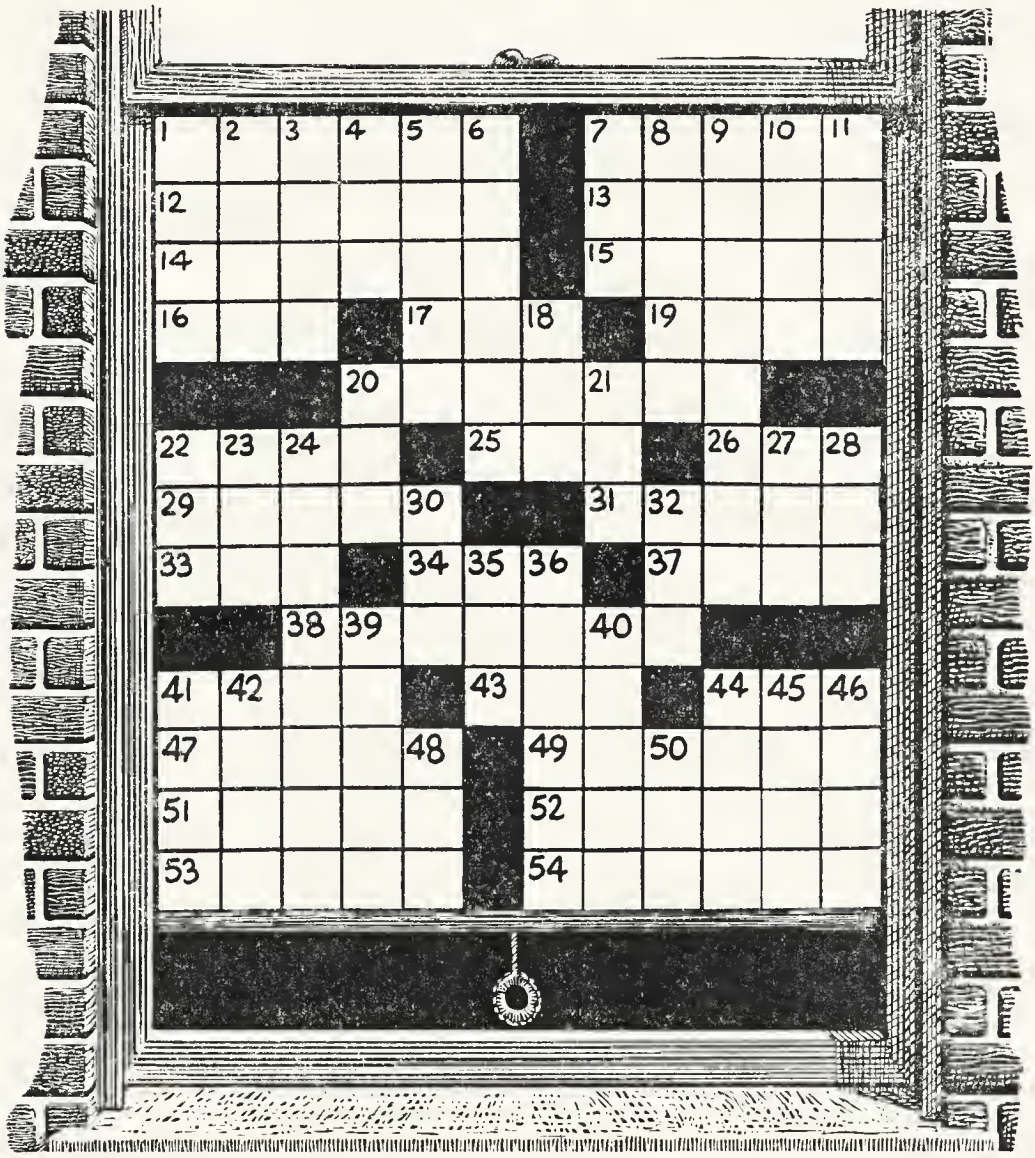
The (25A) was shining now and the dirty (22A) where Cross had seen the terrifying apparition at midnight looked harmless enough now. But when he entered the room he realized that this was a nasty (52A) of fish.

The old woman was summoned at

once. Cross learned from her that the victim was named (45D) Aware. He had rented the room three days before, saying he was soon to be joined by his wife, (31A), who was in Panama. He had also informed the woman that he had just arrived on a ship from (8D).

After a careful examination of the body, Inspector Cross discovered that Aware (4D) been killed by several heavy (1A) on the head, and then hung up by a (26A) torn from one of the sheets on the disordered bed in the far corner of the room.

"Suicide? (1D)," said Cross to Sergeant Ickle. "This is definitely murder and it looks like a (13A). Get to work and (43A) up the facts for me." Then he added to himself, "If I had really been on the beam last night I could have



A CROSSWORD PUZZLE MYSTERY

nabbed the murderer red-handed."

Sergeant Ickle gathered information with considerable dispatch. It did not take him long to discover that Aware had just completed a term of (47A) servitude. When he spoke about Panama, he had been talking through his hat. And his (51A) in women was decidedly broad.

Ickle succeeded in rounding up two of his recent visitors, Miss (15A) Garr, a celebrated night-club dancer with brilliant (35D) hair, and Miss (21D) Poleon, former (20A) of many a Broadway hit. At the moment she looked like a hangover from the Victorian era, for she wore a rakish hat decorated with a huge yellow (40D), and her corsets certainly had (54A) in them.

Ickle ushered all three women and Mr. Way into the house so that Cross could (39D) to them in his crisp way.

"Come on, now, (44D) up," the sergeant told them gruffly. "When Inspector Cross asks you to talk, you (30D) and tell everything you know."

"On the contrary, Sergeant," said Cross quietly. "Please bring them to me one at a time. I have only one important question to ask."

Miss Garr and Miss Poleon were dismissed in short order. Obviously they had answered satisfactorily. Mr. Way requested permission to leave but Cross asked him to (3D) as a witness.

The old woman was very nervous. The inspector noticed that her eyes kept wandering around the room, though her face was like a stiff gray mask. It was evident to him that she was trying to keep a tight (10D) on her emotions.

"Where were (18D) at twelve o'clock last night?" Cross demanded.

The old woman clutched her pointed chin with one dirty (22D). She hesitated a long moment before she replied.

"I had such an (2D) here in my wisdom tooth that I went to bed very early," she told him, her voice reaching the inspector in a hoarse whisper.

"Who (19A) this house?" he asked.

"Why, (7D) does," interrupted Way before the old woman could answer.

Cross swung around to face Way.

"How did you get into this room?"

"Why she used her pass (17A)," replied Way immediately.

Inspector Cross stared at the old (20D), who began to cackle excitedly.

"I (41A) that this man insisted that I show him this room. I told him it was occupied and that I had merely forgotten to take down the vacancy sign."

A horrible thought raced through Cross' mind as he swung his attention back to Way. "Where were you at midnight?" he said sharply.

"You can't (33A)," grumbled Way dejectedly. "I've been sleeping in the park the last few days, but last night there was too much (53A) falling. I didn't like the idea of getting all wet. When I noticed the vacancy sign on this building I went over and rang the bell.

"The woman yelled out through one of the windows that she (32D) not have any rooms. The window near the stoop was open so I crawled in and pulled down the shade. I was desperate for a place to sleep. Without more (44A) I went over and killed the man lying on the bed. Then I hung him up so it would look like a suicide. I put the light on for a second or two to see if I liked the room. I managed to get a good sleep. This morning I sneaked outside and rang the bell—"

His voice went up an (12A) as Inspector Cross clicked on the handcuffs.

"(16A)! You can't do that. She promised to (48D) me have that room!"

The inspector did not pay any attention to Way. Instead, he and Sergeant Ickle hurried Way into the squad car and drove off to headquarters. After the prisoner had been booked for murder the sergeant turned and spoke to his superior officer.

"Congratulations, Inspector," he said. "Now, as sure as my name is (34A) Ickle, I'm going out and order myself a pint of (27D). What will you have?"

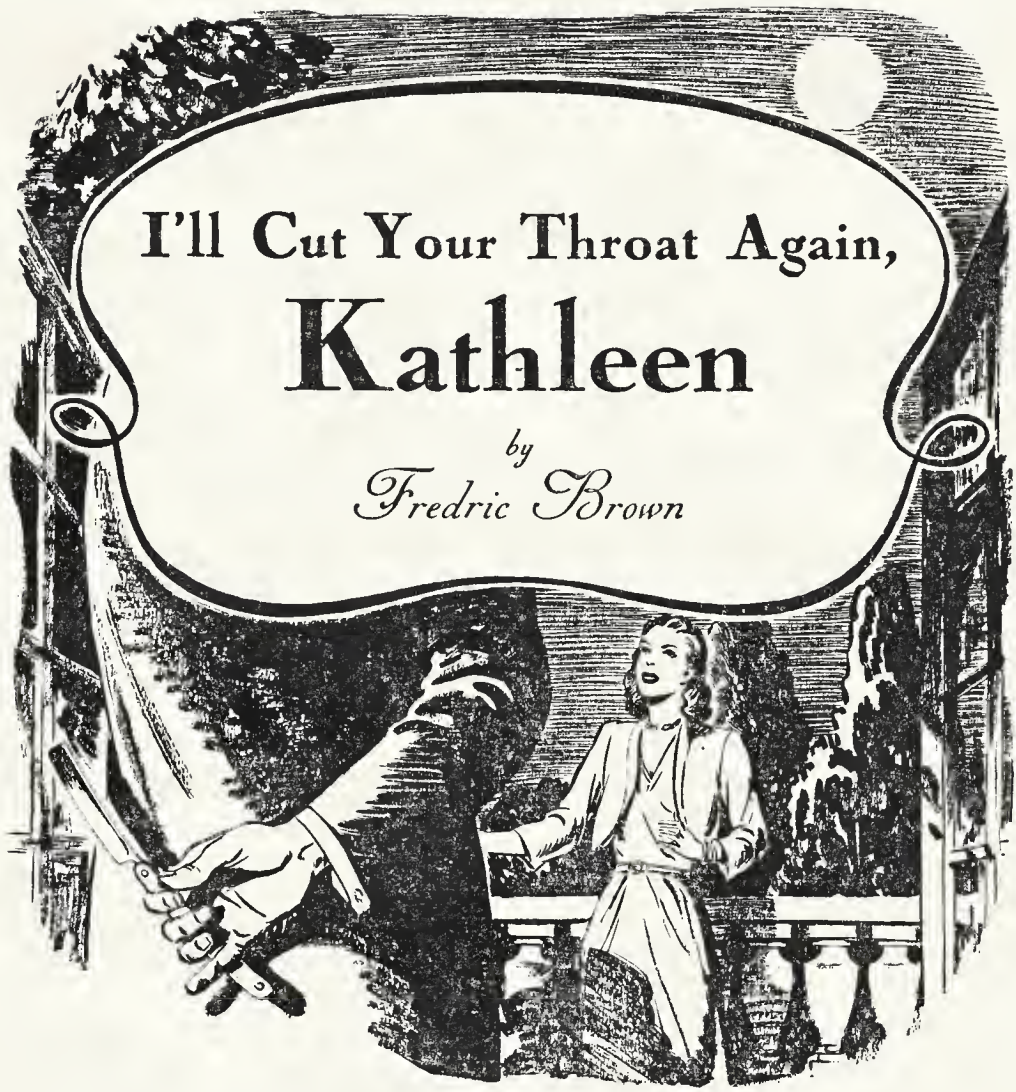
Cross sighed with satisfaction.

"(37A)," he said.

The answer to "The Clue on the Shade" appears on Page 192.

I'll Cut Your Throat Again, Kathleen

by *Fredric Brown*



She was beautiful, standing there in the moonlight

Johnny Marlin comes back after the long months he's spent in an asylum — to find his beautiful wife waiting. . . .

I HEARD the footsteps coming down the hall and I was watching the door—the door that had no knob on my side of it—when it opened.

I thought I'd recognized the step, and I'd been right. It was the young, nice one, the one whose bright hair made so brilliant a contrast with his white uniform coat.

I said, "Hello, Red," and he said, "Hello, Mr. Marlin. I—I'll take you down to the office. The doctors are there now." He sounded more nervous than I felt.

"How much time have I got, Red?"

"How much— Oh, I see what you mean. They're examining a couple of others ahead of you. You've got time."

So I didn't get up off the edge of the bed. I held my hands out in front of me, backs up and the fingers rigid. They didn't tremble any more. My fingers

were as steady as those of a statue, and about as useful. Oh, I could move them. I could even clench them into fists slowly. But for playing sax and clarinet they were about as good as hands of bananas. I turned them over—and there on my wrists were the two ugly scars where, a little less than a year ago, I'd slashed them with a straight razor. Deeply enough to have cut some of the tendons that moved the fingers.

I moved my fingers now, curling them inward toward the palm, slowly. The interne was watching.

"They'll come back, Mr. Marlin," he said. "Exercise—that's all they need." It wasn't true. He knew that I knew he knew it, for when I didn't bother to answer, he went on, almost defensively, "Anyway, you can still arrange and conduct. You can hold a baton all right. And—I got an idea for you, Mr. Marlin."

"Yes, Red?"

"Trombone. Why don't you take up trombone? You could learn it fast, and you don't need finger action to play trombone."

SLOWLY, I shook my head. I didn't try to explain. It was something you couldn't explain, anyway. It wasn't only the physical ability to play an instrument that was gone. It was more than that.

I looked at my hands again and then I put them carefully away in my pockets, where I wouldn't have to look at them.

I looked up at the interne's face again. There was a look on it that I recognized and remembered—the look I'd seen on thousands of young faces across footlights—hero worship. Out of the past it came to me, that look.

He could still look at me that way, even after—

"Red," I asked him, "don't you think I'm insane?"

"Of course not, Mr. Marlin. I don't think you were ever—" He bogged down on that.

I needed him. Maybe it was cruel, but it was crueler to me. I said, "You don't think I was ever crazy? You think I was sane when I tried to kill my wife?"

"Well—it was just temporary. You had a breakdown. You'd been working too hard—twenty hours a day, about. You were near the top with your band. Me, Mr. Marlin, *I* think you were *at* the top. You had it on all of them, only most of the public hadn't found out yet. They would have, if—"

"If I hadn't slipped a cog," I said. I thought, what a way to express going crazy, trying to kill your wife, trying to kill yourself, and losing your memory.

Red looked at his wrist watch, then pulled up a chair and sat down facing me. He talked fast.

"We haven't got too long, Mr. Marlin," he said. "And I want you to pass those doctors and get out of here. You'll be all right once you get out of this joint. Your memory will come back, a little at a time—when you're in the right surroundings."

I shrugged. It didn't seem to matter much. I said, "Okay, brief me. It didn't work last time, but—I'll try."

"You're Johnny Marlin," he said. "*The* Johnny Marlin. You play a mean clarinet, but that's sideline. You're the best alto sax in the business, *I* think. You were fourth in the Down Beat poll a year ago, but—"

I interrupted him. "You mean I *did* play clarinet and sax. Not any more, Red. Can't you get that through your head?" I hadn't meant to sound so rough about it, but my voice got out of control.

Red didn't seem to hear me. His eyes went to his wrist watch again and then came back to me. He started talking again.

"We got ten minutes, maybe. I wish I knew what you remember and what you don't about all I've been telling you the last month. What's your right name —I mean, before you took a professional name?"

"John Dettmann," I said. "Born June first, nineteen-twenty, on the wrong side of the tracks. Orphaned at five. Released from orphanage at sixteen. Worked as bus boy in Cleveland and saved up enough money to buy a clari-

net, and took lessons. Bought a sax a year later, and got my first job with a band at eighteen."

"What band?"

"Heinie Wills'—local band in Cleveland, playing at Danceland there. Played third alto a while, then first alto. Next worked for a six-man combo called —What was it, Red? I don't remember."

"The Basin Streeters, Mr. Marlin. Look, do you really remember any of this, or is it just from what I've told you?"

"Mostly from what you've told me, Red. Sometimes, I get kind of vague pictures, but it's pretty foggy. Let's get on with it. So the Basin Streeters did a lot of traveling for a while and I left them in Chi for my first stretch with a name band— Look, I think I've got that list of bands pretty well memorized. There isn't much time. Let's skip it.

"I joined the army in forty-two—I'd have been twenty-two then. A year at Fort Billings, and then England. Kayoed by a bomb in London before I ever got to pull a trigger except on rifle range. A month in a hospital there, shipped back, six months in a mental hospital here, and let out on a P. N." He knew as well as I did what P. N. meant, but I translated it for us. "Psycho-neurotic. Nuts. Crazy."

HE OPENED his mouth to argue the point, and then decided there wasn't time.

"So I saved my money," I said, "before and during the army, and I started my own band. That would have been—late forty-four?"

Red nodded. "Remember the list of places you've played, the names of your sidemen, what I told you about them?"

"Pretty well," I said. There wouldn't be time to go into that, anyway. I said, "And early in forty-five, while I was still getting started, I got married. To Kathy Courteen. *The* Kathy Courteen, who owns a slice of Chicago, who's got more money than sense. She must have, if she married me. We were married June tenth, nineteen forty-five. Why *did* she marry me, Red?"

"Why shouldn't she," he said. "You're *Johnny Marlin!*"

The funny part of it is, he wasn't kidding. I could tell by his voice he meant it. He thought being Johnny Marlin had really been something. I looked down at my hands. They'd got loose out of my pockets again.

I think I knew, suddenly, why I wanted to get out of this gilt-lined nuthouse that was costing Kathy Courteen —Kathy Marlin, I mean—the price of a fur coat every week to keep me in. It wasn't because I wanted *out,* really. It was because I wanted to get away from the hero worship of this red-headed kid who'd gone nuts about Johnny Marlin's band, and Johnny Marlin's saxophone.

"Have you ever seen Kathy, Red?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I've seen pictures of her, newspaper pictures of her. She's beautiful."

"Even with a scar across her throat?" I asked.

His eyes avoided mine. They went to his watch again, and he stood up quickly. "We'd better get down there," he said.

He went to the knobless door, opencd it with a key, and politely held it open for me to precede him out into the hallway.

That look in his eyes made me feel foolish, as always. I don't know how he did it, but Red always managed to look *up* at me, from a height a good six inches taller than mine.

Then, side by side, we went down the great stairway of that plush-lined madhouse that had once been a million dollar mansion and was now a million dollar sanitarium with more employees than inmates.

We went into the office and the gray-haired nurse behind the desk nodded and said, "They're ready for you."

"Luck, Mr. Marlin," Red said. "I'm pulling for you."

So I went through the door. There were three of them, as last time.

"Sit down, please, Mr. Marlin," Dr. Glasspiegel, the head one, said.

They sat each upon one side of the square table, leaving the fourth side and the fourth chair for me. I slid into it. I put my hands in my pockets again. I knew if I looked at them or thought about them, I might say something foolish, and then I'd be here a while again.

Then they were asking me questions, taking turns at it. Some about my past —and Red's coaching had been good. Once or twice, but not often, I had to stall and admit my memory was hazy on a point or two. And some of the questions were about the present, and they were easy. I mean, it was easy to see what answers they wanted to those questions, and to give them.

But it had been like this the last time, I remembered, over a month ago. And I'd missed somewhere. They hadn't let me go. Maybe, I thought, because they got too much money out of keeping me here. I didn't really think that. These men were the best in their profession.

There was a lull in the questioning. They seemed to be waiting for something. For what? I wondered, and it came to me that the last interview had been like this, too.

THE door behind me opened, quietly, but I heard it. And I remembered —that had happened last time, too. Just as they told me I could leave and they'd talk it over, someone else had come in. I'd passed him as I'd left the room.

And, suddenly, I knew what I'd missed up on. It had been someone I'd been supposed to recognize, and I hadn't. And here was the same test again. Before I turned, I tried to remember what Red had told me about people I'd known—but there was so little physical description to it. It seemed hopeless.

"You may return to your room now, Mr. Marlin," Dr. Glasspiegel was saying. "We—ah—wish to discuss your case."

"Thanks," I said, and stood up.

I saw that he'd taken off his shell rimmed glasses and was tapping them nervously on the back of his hand, which lay on the table before him. I thought, okay, so now I know the catch and next time I'll make the grade. I'll have Red get me pictures of my band and other bands I've played with and as many newspaper pictures as he can find of people I knew.

I turned. The man in the doorway, standing there as though waiting for me to leave, was short and fat. There was a tense look in his face, even though his eyes were avoiding mine. He was looking past me, at the doctors. I tried to think fast. Who did I know that was short and—

I took a chance. I'd had a trumpet player named Tubby Hayes.

"Tubby!" I said.

And hit the jackpot. His face lighted up like a neon sign and he grinned a yard wide and stuck out his hand.

"Johnny! Johnny, it's good to see you." He was making like a pump handle with my arm.

"Tubby Hayes!" I said, to let them know I knew his last name, too. "Don't tell me you're nuts, too. That why you're here?"

He laughed, nervously. "I came to get you, Johnny. That is, uh, if—" He looked past me.

Dr. Glasspiegel was clearing his throat. He and the other doctors were standing now.

"Yes," he said, "I believe it will be all right for Mr. Marlin to leave."

He put his hand on my shoulder. They were all standing about me now.

"Your reactions are normal, Mr. Marlin," he said. "Your memory is still a bit impaired but—ah—it will improve gradually. More rapidly, I believe, amid familiar surroundings than here. You —ah—have plans?"

"No," I said, frankly.

"Don't overwork again. Take things easy for a while. And . . ."

There was a lot more advice. And then signing things, and getting ready. It was almost an hour before we got into a cab, Tubby and I.

He gave the address, and I recognized it. The Carleton. That was where I'd lived, that last year. Where Kathy still lived.

"How's Kathy?" I asked.

"Fine, Johnny. I guess she is. I mean—"

"You mean what?"

He looked a bit embarrassed. "Well—I mean I haven't seen her. She never liked us boys, Johnny. You know that. But she was square with us. You know we decided we couldn't hold together without you, Johnny, and might as well break up. Well, she paid us what we had coming—the three weeks you were on the cuff, I mean—and doubled it, a three-weeks bonus to tide us over."

"The boys doing okay, Tubby?"

"Yep, Johnny. All of them. Well—except Harry. He kind of got lost in the snow if you know what I mean."

"That's tough," I said, and didn't elaborate. I didn't know whether I was supposed to know that Harry had been taking cocaine or not. And there had been two Harrys with the band, at that.

SO THE band was busted up. In a way I was glad. If someone had taken over and held it together, maybe there'd have been an argument about trying to get me to come back.

"A month ago, Tubby," I said, "they examined me at the sanitarium and I flunked. I think it was because I didn't recognize somebody. Was it you? Were you there then?"

"You walked right by me, through the door, Johnny. You never saw me."

"You were there—for that purpose? Both times?"

"Yes, Johnny. That Doc Glasspiegel suggested it. He got to know me, and to think of me, I guess, because I dropped around so often to ask about you. Why wouldn't they let me see you?"

"Rules," I said. "That's Glasspiegel's system, part of it. Complete isolation during the period of cure. I haven't even seen Kathy."

"No!" said Tubby. "They told me you couldn't have visitors, but I didn't know it went that far." He sighed. "She sure must be head over heels for you, Johnny. What I hear, she's carried the torch."

"God knows why," I said. "After I cut—"

"Shut up," Tubby said sharply. "You aren't to think or talk about that. Glasspiegel told me that, while you were getting ready."

"Okay," I said. It didn't matter. "Does Kathy know we're coming?"

"We? I'm not going in, Johnny. I'm just riding to the door with you. No, she doesn't know. You asked the doc not to tell her, didn't you?"

"I didn't want a reception. I just want to walk in quietly. Sure, I asked the doctor, but I thought maybe he'd warn her anyway. So she could hide the knives."

"Now, Johnny—"

"Okay," I said.

I looked out of the window of the cab. I knew where we were and just how far from the Carleton. Funny my topography hadn't gone the way the rest of my memory had. But I still knew the streets and their names, even though I couldn't recognize my best friend or my wife. The mind is a funny thing, I thought.

"One worry you won't have," Tubby Hayes said. "That lush brother of hers, Myron Courteen, the one that was always in your hair."

The red-headed interne had mentioned that Kathy had a brother. Apparently, I wasn't supposed to like him.

So I said, "Did someone drop him down a well?"

"Headed west. He's a Los Angeles playboy now. Guess he finally quarrelled with Kathy and she settled an allowance on him and let him go."

We were getting close to the Carleton—only a half dozen blocks to go—and suddenly I realized there was a lot that I didn't know, and should know.

"Let's have a drink, Tubby," I said. I—I'm not quite ready to go home yet."

"Sure, Johnny," he said, and then spoke to the cab driver.

We swung in to the curb in front of a swanky neon-plated tavern. It didn't look familiar, like the rest of the street did. Tubby saw me looking.

"Yeah, it's new," he said. "Been here only a few months."

We went in and sat at a dimly lighted

bar. Tubby ordered two Scotch-and-sodas without asking me, so I guess that's what I used to drink. I didn't remember. Anyway, it tasted all right, and I hadn't had a drink for eleven months, so even the first sip of it hit me a little.

And when I'd drunk it all, it tasted better than all right. I looked at myself in the blue mirror back of the bar. I thought, there's always this. I can always drink myself to death—on Kathy's money. I knew I didn't have any myself because Tubby had said I was three weeks on the cuff with the band.

We ordered a second round and I asked Tubby, "How come this Myron hasn't money of his own, if he's Kathy's brother?" He looked at me strangely. I'd been doing all right up to now. I said, "Yeah, there are things I'm still hazy about."

"Oh," he said. "Well, that one's easy. Myron is worse than a black sheep for the Courteens. He's a no-good louse and an all-around stinker. He was disinherited, and Kathy got it all. But she takes care of him."

HE TOOK a sip of his drink and put it down again. "You know, Johnny," he said, "none of us liked Kathy much because she was against you having the band and wanted you to herself. But we were wrong about her. She's swell. The way she sticks to her menfolk no matter what they do. Even Myron."

"Even me," I said.

"Well—she saved your life, Johnny. With blood—" He stopped abruptly. "Forget it, Johnny."

I finished my second drink. I said, "I'll tell you the truth, Tubby. I can't forget it—because I don't remember it. But I've got to know, before I face her. What did happen that night?"

"Johnny, I—"

"Tell me," I said. "Straight."

He sighed. "Okay, Johnny. You'd been working close to twenty-four hours a day trying to put us over, and we'd tried to get you to slow down and so did Kathy."

"Skip the build-up."

"That night, after we played at the hotel, we rehearsed some new stuff. You acted funny, then, Johnny. You forgot stuff, and you had a headache. We made you go home early, in spite of yourself. And when you got home—well, you slipped a cog, Johnny. You picked a quarrel with your wife—I don't know what you accused her of. And you went nuts. You got your razor—you always used to shave with a straight-edge—and, well you tried to kill her. And then yourself."

"You're skipping the details," I said. "How did she save my life?"

"Well, Johnny, you hadn't killed her like you thought. The cut went deep on one side of her throat but—she must have been pulling away—it went light across the center and didn't get the jugular or anything. But there was a lot of blood and she fainted, and you thought she was dead, I guess, and slashed your own wrists. But she came to, and found you bleeding to death fast. Bleeding like she was, she got tourniquets on both your arms and held 'em, and kept yelling until one of the servants woke up and got the Carleton house-doctor. That's all, Johnny."

"It's enough, isn't it?" I thought a while and then I added, "Thanks, Tubby. Look, you run along and leave me. I want to think it out and sweat it out alone, and then I'll walk the rest of the way. Okay?"

"Okay, Johnny," he said. "You'll call me up soon?"

"Sure," I said. "Thanks for everything."

"You'll be all right, Johnny?"

"Sure. I'm all right."

After he left, I ordered another drink. My third, and it would have to be my last, because I was really feeling them. I didn't want to go home drunk, to face Kathy.

I sat there, sipping it slowly, looking at myself in that blue mirror back of the bar. I wasn't a bad looking guy, in a blue mirror. Only I should be dead instead of sitting there. I should have died that night eleven months ago. I'd

tried to die.

I was almost alone at the bar. There was one couple drinking martinis at the far end of it. The girl was a blonde who looked like a chorus girl. I wondered idly if Kathy was a blonde. I hadn't thought to ask anyone. If Kathy walked in here now, I thought, I wouldn't know her.

The blonde down there picked up some change off the bar and walked over to the juke box. She put in a coin and punched some buttons, and then swayed her hips back to the bar. The juke box started playing and it was an old record and a good one—the Harry James version of the *Memphis Blues*. Blue and brassy stuff from the days back before Harry went commercial.

I sat there listening, and feeling like the devil. I thought, I've got to get over it. Every time I hear stuff like that I can't go on wanting to kill myself just because I can't play any more myself. I'm not the only guy in the world who can't play music. And the others get by.

MY HANDS were lying on the bar in front of me and I tried them again, while I listened, and they wouldn't work. They wouldn't ever work again. My thumbs were okay, but the four fingers on each hand opened and closed together and not separately, as though they were webbed together.

Maybe the Scotch was making me feel better, but—maybe, I decided—maybe it wouldn't be too bad—

Then the Harry James ended and another record slid onto the turntable and started, and it was going to be blue, too. *Mood Indigo*. I recognized the opening bar of the introduction. I wondered idly if all the records were blues, chosen to match the blue back-bar mirrors.

Deep blue stuff, anyway, and well handled and arranged, whoever was doing it. A few Scotches and a blue mood, and that *Mood Indigo* can take hold of your insides and wring them. And this waxing of it was solid, pretty solid. The brasses tossed it to the reeds and then the piano took it for a moment, backed by wire-brush stuff on the skins, and modulated it into a higher key and built it up and you knew something was coming.

And then something came, and it was an alto sax, a sax with a tone like blue velvet, swinging high, wide and off the beat, and tossing in little arabesques of counterpoint so casually that it never seemed to leave the melody to do it. An alto sax riding high and riding hot, and with a tone like molten gold.

I unwound my fingers from around the Scotch-and-soda glass and got up and walked across the room to the juke box. I knew already, but I looked. The record playing was Number 9, and Number 9 was *Mood Indigo*—Johnny Marlin.

For a black second I felt that I had to stop it, that I had to smash my fist through the glass and jerk the tone-arm off the record. I had to because it was doing things to me. That sound out of the past was making me remember, and I knew suddenly that the only way I could keep on wanting to live at all was *not* to remember.

Maybe I would have smashed the glass. I don't know. But instead I saw the cord and plug where the juke box plugged into the wall outlet beside it. I jerked on the cord and the box went dark and silent. Then I walked out into the dusk, with the three of them staring at me—the blonde and her escort and the bartender.

The bartender called out "Hey!" but didn't go on with it when I went on out without turning. I saw them in the mirror on the inside of the door as I opened it, a frozen tableau that slid sidewise off the mirror as the door opened.

I must have walked the six blocks to the Carleton, through the gathering twilight. I crossed the wide mahogany-paneled lobby to the elevator. The uniformed operator looked familiar to me—more familiar than Tubby. At least there was an impression that I'd seen him before.

"Good evening, Mr. Marlin," he said, and didn't ask me what floor I wanted.

But his voice sounded strange, tense,

and he waited a moment, stuck his head out of the elevator and looked around, before he closed the door. I got the impression that he was hoping for another passenger, that he hated to shut himself and me in that tiny closed room.

But no one else came into the lobby and he slid the door shut and moved the handle. The building slid downward past us and came to rest at the eleventh floor. I stepped out into another mahogany-paneled hall and the elevator door slid shut behind me.

It was a short hallway, on this floor, with only four doors leading to what must be quite large suites. I knew which door was mine—or should I say Kathy's. My money never paid for a suite like that.

There was a leather case of keys in my pocket. One of them, I felt sure, would have fitted that door. But I didn't want just to walk in somehow. I rang the bell instead.

IT WASN'T Kathy who opened the door. I knew that because she was wearing a maid's uniform. And she must, I thought, be new. She looked at me blankly.

"Mrs. Marlin in?" I asked.

"No sir. She'll be back soon, sir."

I went on in. "I'll wait," I said. I followed her until she opened the door of a room that looked like a library.

"In here, please," she said. "And may I have your name?"

"Marlin," I said, as I walked past her. "Johnny Marlin."

She caught her breath a little, audibly. Then she said, "Yes, sir," and hurried away.

Her heels didn't click on the thick carpeting of the hall, but I could tell she was hurrying. Hurrying away from a homicidal maniac, back to the farthest reaches of the apartment, probably to the protective company of a cook who would keep a cleaver handy, once she heard the news that the mad master of the manse was back. And likely there'd be new servants, if any, tomorrow.

I walked up and down a while, and then decided I wanted to go to my room. I thought, if I don't think about it I can go there. My subconscious will know the way. And it worked; I went to my room.

I sat on the edge of the bed a while, with my head in my hands, wondering why I'd come here. Then I looked around. It was a big room, paneled like the rest of the joint, beautifully and tastefully furnished. Little Johnny Dettmann of the Cleveland slums had come a long way to have a room like that, all to himself. There was a Capehart radio-phonograph across the room from me, and a big cabinet of albums. Most of the pictures on the walls were framed photographs of bands. In a silver frame on the dresser was the picture of a woman.

That would be Kathy, of course. I crossed over and looked at it. She was beautiful, all right, a big-eyed brunette with pouting, kissable lips. And the fog was getting thinner. I almost knew and remembered her.

I looked a long time at that photograph, and then I put it down and went to the closet door. I opened it and there were a lot of suits in that closet, and a lot of pairs of shoes and a choice of hats. I remembered; John Dettmann had worn a sweater to high school one year because he didn't have a suit coat.

But there was something missing in that closet. The instrument cases. On the floor, there at the right, should have been two combination cases for sax and clarinet. Inside them should have been two gold-plated alto saxes and two sleek black Selmer clarinets. At the back of the closet should have been a bigger case that held a baritone sax I sometimes fooled around with at home.

THEY were all gone, and I was grateful to Kathy for that. She must have understood how it would make me feel to have them around.

I closed the closet door gently, and opened the door next to it, the bathroom. I went in and stood looking at myself in the mirror over the wash bowl. It wasn't a blue mirror. I stu-

died my face, and it was an ordinary face. There wasn't any reason in that mirror why anyone should love me the way my wife must. I wasn't tall and I wasn't handsome. I was just a mug who had played a lot of sax—once.

The mirror was the door of a built-in medicine cabinet sunk into the tile wall and I opened it. Yes, all my toilet stuff was neatly laid out on the shelves of the cabinet, as though I'd never been away, or as though I'd been expected back daily. Even—and I almost took a step backwards—both of my straight-edge razors—the kind of razor a barber uses —lay there on the bottom shelf besides the shaving mug and brush.

Was Kathy crazy to leave them there, after what I'd used such a thing for? Had it even been one of these very razors? I could, of course, have had three of them, but— No, I remembered, there were only two, a matched pair.

In the sanitarium, I'd used an electric razor, naturally. All of them there did, even ones there for less deadly reasons than mine. And I was going to keep on using one. I'd take these and drop them down the incinerator, right now. If my wife was foolhardy enough to leave those things in a madman's room, *I* wasn't. How could I be sure I'd never go off the beam again?

My hand shook a little as I picked them up and closed the mirrored door. I'd take them right now and get rid of them. I went out of the bathroom and was crossing my own room, out in the middle of it, when there was a soft tap on the door—the connecting door from Kathy's room. "Johnny—" her voice said.

I thrust the razors out of sight into my coat pocket, and answered—I don't remember exactly what. My heart seemed to be in my throat, blocking my voice. And the door opened and Kathy came in—came in like the wind in a headlong rush that brought her into my arms. And with her face buried in my shoulder.

"Johnny, Johnny," she was saying, "I'm so glad you're back."

Then we kissed, and it lasted a long time, that kiss. But it didn't do anything to me. If I'd been in love with Kathy once, I'd have to start all over again, now. Oh, it was nice kissing her, as it would be nice kissing any beautiful woman. It wouldn't be hard to fall again. But so much easier and better, I thought, if I could push away all of the fog, if I could remember.

"I'm glad to be back, Kathy," I said.

Her arms tightened about me, almost convulsively. There was a big lounge chair next to the Capehart. I picked her up bodily, since she didn't want to let go of me, and crossed to the chair. I sat in it with her on my lap. After a minute, she straightened up and her eyes met mine, questioningly.

The question was, "Do you love me, Johnny?"

But I couldn't meet it just then. I'd pretend, of course, when I got my bearings, and after a while my memory would come the rest of the way back—or I'd manage to love her again, instead. But just then, I ducked the question and her eyes.

Instead, I looked at her throat and saw the scar. It wasn't as bad as I'd feared. It was a thin, long line that wouldn't have been noticeable over a yard away.

"Plastic surgery, Johnny," she said. "It can do wonders. Another year and it won't show at all. It—it doesn't matter." Then, as though to forestall my saying anything more about it, she said quickly, "I gave away your saxophones, Johnny. I—I figured you wouldn't want them around. The doctors say you'll never be able to—to play again."

I NODDED. I said, "I guess it's best not to have them around."

"It's going to be so wonderful, Johnny. Maybe you'll hate me for saying it, but I'm—almost—glad. You know that was what came between us, your band and your playing. And it won't now, will it? You won't want to try another band —just directing and not playing—or anything foolish like that, will you, Johnny?"

"No, Kathy," I said.

Nothing, I thought, would mean anything without playing. I'd been trying to forget that. I closed my eyes and tried, for a moment, not to think.

"It'll be so wonderful, Johnny. You can do all the things I wanted you to do, and that you wouldn't. We can travel, spend our winters in Florida, and entertain. When France is normal again, we can live on the Riviera part of the time, and we can ski in the Tyrol and play the wheels at Monte Carlo and—and everything I've wanted to do, Johnny."

"It's nice to have a few million," I said.

She pulled back a little and looked at me. "Johnny, you're not going to start *that* again, are you? Oh, Johnny, you can't—now."

No, I thought, I can't. Heaven knows why she wants him to be one, but little Johnny Dettmann is a kept man, now, a rich girl's darling. He can't make money the only way he knows how now. He couldn't even hold a job as a bus boy or dig ditches. But he'll learn to balance teacups on his knee and smile at dowagers. He'll have to. It was coming back to me now, that endless argument.

But the argument was over now. There wasn't any longer anything to argue about.

"Kiss me, Johnny," Kathy said, and when I had, she said, "Let's have some music, huh? And maybe a dance—you haven't forgotten how to dance, have you, Johnny?"

She jumped up from my lap and went to the record album cabinet.

"Some of mine, will you, Kathy?" I asked. I thought, I might as well get used to it now, all at once. So I won't feel again, ever, as I had when I'd almost put my fist through that juke box window.

"Of course, Johnny."

She took them from one of the albums, half a dozen of them, and put them on the Capehart. The first one started, and it was a silly gay tune we'd once waxed—*"Chickery chick, cha la, cha la. . . ."* And she came back, holding out her hands to me to get up and dance, and I did, and I still knew how to dance.

And we danced over to the French doors that led to the balcony and opened them, and out onto the marble floor of the little railed balcony, into the cool darkness of the evening, with a full moon riding high in the sky overhead.

Chickery chick—a nice tune, if a silly tune. No vocal, of course. We'd never gone for them. Not gut-bucket stuff, either, but smooth rhythm, with a beat. And a high-riding alto sax, smooth as silk.

And I was remembering the argument. It had been one, a vicious one. Musician versus playboy as my career. I was remembering *Kathy* now, and suddenly tried not to. Maybe it would be better to forget all that bitterness, the quarreling and the overwork and everything that led up to the blankness of the breakdown.

But our feet moved smoothly on the marble. Kathy danced well. And the record ended.

"It's going to be wonderful, Johnny," she whispered, "having you all to myself . . . You're *mine* now, Johnny."

"Yes," I said. I thought, I've *got* to be.

THE second record started, and it was a contrast. A number as blue as *Mood Indigo,* and dirtier. *St. James Infirmary*, as waxed by Johnny Marlin and his orchestra. And I remembered the hot day in the studio when we'd waxed it. Again no vocal, but as we started dancing again, the words ran through my mind with the liquid gold of the alto sax I'd once played.

"I went down to St. James Infirmary . . . Saw my *ba*by there . . . Stretched on a long white table . . . So sweet, so cold, so—"

I jerked away from her, ran inside and shut off the phonograph. I caught sight of my face in the mirror over the dresser as I passed. It was white as a corpse's face. I went back to the balcony. Kathy still stood there—she hadn't moved.

"Johnny, what—?"

"That tune," I said. "Those words. I *remember*, Kathy. I remember that night. *I didn't do it.*"

I felt weak. I leaned back against the wall behind me. Kathy came closer.

"Johnny—what do you mean?"

"I remember," I said. "I walked in, and you were lying there—with blood all over your throat and your dress—*when I came in the room.* I *don't* remember after that—but that's what must have knocked me off my base, after everything else. That's when I went crazy, not before."

"Johnny—you're wrong—"

The weakness was gone now. I stood straighter.

"Your brother," I said. "He hated you because you ran his life, like you wanted to run mine, because you had the money he thought should be his, and you doled it out to him and *ran* him. Sure, he hated you. I remember him now. Kathy, I remember. That was about the time he got past liquor and was playing with dope. Cocaine, wasn't it? And that night he came in, sky-high and murderous, before I did. And tried to kill you, and probably thought he did. And ran. It must have been just before I came in."

"Johnny, please—you're wrong—"

"You came to, after I keeled over," I said. "It—it sounds incredible, Kathy, but it had to be that way. And, Kathy, that cold mind of yours saw a way to get everything it wanted. To protect your brother, and to get me, the way you wanted me. It was perfect, Kathy. Fix me so I'd never play again, and at the same time put me in a spot where I'd be tied to you forever because I'd think I tried to kill you."

I said, "You get your way, don't you, Kathy? At any cost. But you didn't want me to die. I'll bet you had those tourniquets ready *before you slashed my wrists.*"

She was beautiful, standing there in the moonlight. She stood there tall and straight, and she came the step between us and put her soft arms around me.

"But Johnny, don't I win?" she said.

She was beautiful, leaning back to look up into my face. Yes, she'd won. *So sweet, so cold, so bare.* So bare her throat that even in the moonlight I could see the faint scar, the dotted line. And one of my crippled hands, in my pocket, fumbled open one of the razors, and brought it out of my pocket, and up, and across.

"Extra! Extra! Midget Murdered at the Carnival!"

ED HUNTER looked at the headline. It sounded so simple, after all. What more logical place was there for a midget to be murdered? Only it wasn't right—there was a word missing. It should have read: "Midget murdered at the *wrong* carnival!"

Hunter remembered the dead face staring at him. The midget had known the knife was coming, but he hadn't yelled. And the murder had been done by somebody who didn't believe in picking on anybody his own size. . . .

The midget's killing is only the first of the brutal crimes in THE DEAD RINGER, by Fredric Brown, next issue's complete book-length novel. It's a baffling and exciting yarn, set in a colorful carnival background—a merry-go-round of murder in which the brass ring is the solution of the mystery!

My Wilbur

I forced myself to stare at the body of my wife (CHAP. I)

THE police came, after a time. Their sirens made wailing sounds in the night and their heavy feet made dull echoes on the porch and in the hall. They were coldly efficient, asking few questions at first, intent only on seeing the situation for themselves.

I sat in the big chair by the radio, feeling the blind shock and horror run from my mind to my belly until I was

Best Friend is DEATH

S. Peacock

The police were on one side, the real killer was on the other, and Bob Cummings was right in the middle in this tense mystery novelet!

almost ill. I tried to smoke and the cigarette fumes tasted like the smell of burning leather. I tried to keep my thinking calm, but thoughts raced like trapped rats in a wire cage. A uniformed patrolman watched me closely from beside the door and his gaze drew perspiration in a thin film along my spine.

Voices sounded in the bedroom—the heavy unemotional voice of the detective who called himself Lieutenant Oliver and the dry raspy voice of another man who had carried a doctor's satchel. I tried to catch the words but none made sense.

I tried to reconstruct the events of the past half hour but memories blurred one into another, until nothing was clear. I chain-lit a cigarette and looked up to see that Lieutenant Oliver was watching me from the bedroom door.

"She's dead," he said gently.

"Well, do something," I said and felt myself shaking. "Don't just stand there."

Oliver shrugged, crossed the room and sat on the edge of the couch. His features were young but his hair was grizzled. His eyes held no expression at all as they looked at me.

"Suppose you tell me what happened," he said.

"I didn't do it." My voice began to raise and I held it in check by a great effort.

"Nobody said you did," the detective answered. "Now suppose you tell me what happened."

I snubbed out the cigarette and immediately lit another. A flashbulb made a puff of light in the bedroom and I burned myself, holding the match too long.

"Well?" Lieutenant Oliver said.

I licked my lips. They were like sandpaper. "I found her—my wife—lying on her bed," I said. "She was dead, murdered."

"Oh!" Oliver twisted a stubby cigar in heavy fingers.

"Look," I said. "The killer's getting away!"

"Maybe!" Lieutenant Oliver shrugged indifferently. "Now let's hear your story in greater detail."

Somehow I managed to calm myself. The flashbulb flared again and I could hear voices of the police who were still in the bedroom. I swallowed heavily, shivering, remembering.

"I got up this morning," I said, "and made coffee. That was about eight. I drank a cup, then put on my hat and coat. I knocked at Miriam's door to see if she wanted anything downtown. She didn't answer, so I opened the door and went in." I caught my breath at the terror-filled memory. "She was dead, on the bed. I saw she had been shot in the temple."

"And?" Lieutenant Oliver prompted when I fell silent.

"I called—you," I said.

Oliver's fingers went still. "Just us?" he asked.

I swallowed. I knew I had made a slip. "I called a friend, too," I said.

"A friend—*who?*"

"Carter, Tom Carter."

OLIVER'S cigar was twisting again, over and over, until I wanted to reach out and slap it from his hand. I crushed out my cigarette, reaching for a fresh one in my pocket and saw the involuntary movement of the cop beside the door as his right hand reached for his belt gun.

"Carter's a lawyer, right?" Lieutenant Oliver said. "Why did you think you needed a lawyer?"

"I didn't. I—" Panic was building in my mind. "Look, Tom's my friend. I didn't know what to do. I called him and he told me to report to you immediately."

"*He* was smart, at least," Oliver said. "What's his number?"

I shook my head. "He's not in town. He's at his lodge at Bear Lake, upstate." I felt the constriction of my collar. "He's driving in."

Lieutenant Oliver glanced at his wristwatch and I could see he was figuring how long the drive would take. Bear Lake was fifty miles from town—to drive in would take an hour, even at top speed.

The doctor thrust his head through the door, blinking myopically behind thick glasses. He glanced at me, then turned his gaze toward Lieutenant Oliver.

"Thirteen hours, Oliver," he said, "give or take one either way. That's the most I can say right now. I'll run a fast PM once we get her downtown."

"Thanks, Dade," Lieutenant Oliver said and came from the couch. "Let's take a look, Mr. Cummings," he said to me.

"*No!*" My hands were gripping the chair arms.

Oliver's eyes seemed to frost. They stared as though probing deep into my mind. He put the cigar back into his vest pocket.

"Let's take a look," he repeated.

His voice was as unemotional as ever. He might have been asking me the time of day, instead of wanting me to go into the room where my wife lay in death.

I got up. I had no choice. I came to my feet, feeling the blind terror grip-

ping my heart again. Then I went past Oliver and into the bedroom.

Miriam lay almost exactly as she had when I found her. She was curled as if a stomach cramp had drawn her knees high toward her soft breasts. I could see the white sheen of her teeth through partly-opened lips. The mascaraed lashes made a dark fringe about her staring eyes.

I turned away and Oliver spun me back. He did it gently, but there was strength in his fingers. I forced myself to stare at the body of my wife, fancying that I saw the flicker of hate in her eyes that was always there when she looked at me.

"This the way you found her?" Oliver asked impersonally.

I hated him suddenly. He was like a block of gray ice, without feeling, without emotions.

"Yes!" I said.

Lieutenant Oliver nodded to himself, bending over the body. It faced us, head on the pillow. The head and rear of the bed fitted into one corner of the room. White curtains moved in the gentle breeze at an open window and from outside, I could hear the whistle of somebody passing on the sidewalk.

There was a gun on the table, a .32 automatic. Involuntarily, my hand went toward it, then came back as I realized whose it was.

"Your gun?" Lieutenant Oliver said.

I nodded. There was no point in lying. The numbers could be traced.

I saw then that three other men were in the room, the doctor and two detectives. The bigger detective jerked his thumb at me and Oliver nodded.

"Let Simpson make a mask of your hands, Mr. Cummings," Oliver said.

The bulky detective painted the crotch of my thumb and the back and palm of my right hand with hot wax. Simpson peeled the wax, then flushed the inner surface of the mold with a liquid from a bottle in a small laboratory kit. Blue specks jumped into prominence.

"Fired a gun lately?" Oliver asked.

"Well, yes," I said. "I was at my rifle clubs last night."

Oliver nodded. "Okay," he said to Simpson. The detective began to pack his kit. "Now, Mr. Cummings," Lieutenant Oliver continued. "Let's run over your movements of last night."

I hesitated.

"I could warn you," Oliver said flatly, "that lying will gain you nothing. We'll check everything you tell us. It's surprising what comes out when witnesses begin to remember things."

"There isn't much to tell," I said. "I went to my rifle club about six, had dinner, then spent the evening on the range."

"By yourself? You weren't with any particular people or group?"

Perspiration was on my face, yet I dared not turn away from Oliver. Somehow I was deathly afraid of this gray block of a man. The fumes of the whiskey I had drunk the night before swirled in my mind, covering everything with an impalpable mist which made thinking hard and uncertain. I was afraid to lie to the man and yet I knew I had no right to drag in anybody else.

"I was by myself—that is, I went by myself but met others there."

"What rifle club?" Oliver was twisting his cigar again.

"The Claremont Club on Seventieth Street."

Lieutenant Oliver nodded absently, then bent and drew the sheet over Miriam's nightgown-clad body. One last glimpse I had of her staring eyes and crimson mouth then the sheet covered everything.

"Who do you think did the shooting?" he said.

I shook my head. "I don't know."

"You didn't do it?"

"No." My mouth was dry. I needed a drink. Ordinarily I was on the wagon but after last night and this morning I needed a drink badly.

I wanted to get out of the bedroom. I wanted out of there as I had never wanted anything in my life. Lieutenant Oliver was being sadistic, brutally so, keeping me in there.

"You loved your wife?" Oliver asked.

"We were married," I countered.

"Oh!" He put the cigar away. "Simpson!"

"Yes, sir," the bulky detective said.

"Take Mr. Cummings down to Headquarters."

"Look," I said. "Why are you taking me down?"

For one infinitesimal second the expression changed in Lieutenant Oliver's eyes and what I saw there chilled my blood. I knew then the singleness of purpose, the raw honesty of this detective.

"To be booked," he said. "The charge —suspicion of murder."

CHAPTER II

THE cell was large. It held four bunks tiered, two on each side. The front opening gave into the corridor. There was the stench of disinfectant and soapy water coming from where a trusty mopped with more vigor than skill. He sang mournfully in a soft voice, the words going around and around until I thought they would drive me mad.

I lay on the bottom bunk, trying to remember all the details of the night before—but nothing made sense. I recalled only coming in, staggering against the hall table and almost collapsing into my bed because I was so drunk.

"Shut up!" I roared at the trusty, but he gave no heed. The *swish-swish* of his mop paced the meter of his tune.

The routine had been humiliating. Name, address, occupation, age—all had been written onto a stiff sheet of paper by a bored sergeant at the desk. A couple of reporters came up to the desk but were brushed off by Simpson. Then came fingerprinting and the taking of my pictures.

Everybody seemed more or less bored by the entire routine. Yet I had the feeling that everything I did was noted and filed away in trained memories. Then at last came the cell, bare and uncomfortable, sterile in its indifference.

I waited. The minutes passed leadenly, one marching slowly behind the other. My thoughts were a maelstrom, going nowhere, angling one with another.

A door clanged heavily. Feet drew echoes from the floor, and then a uniformed cop was twisting a key in the door lock.

I looked up, gladness swelling in me as never before, at sight of Tom Carter's smiling face.

"Thank God you're here!" I said. "Get me out of this place, Tom."

"Thirty minutes," the cop said and relocked the door.

Tom shook hands, his smile fading. But now I could feel some of the confidence which was his so naturally and it was a good sensation.

"Got here as quickly as I could, Bob," Carter said.

"I'm glad you came at all," I said. "Now, look, get me out of here before I go crazy."

"Sit down," Tom said and seated himself across from me on the other bunk. "This is pretty serious. I haven't had a chance to talk to Lieutenant Oliver but from what I gathered upstairs, you're in pretty deep."

"I didn't kill Miriam," I said. "You've got to believe that, Tom!"

He spread broad hands. "I do," he said but a shadow of doubt lay across his eyes. "Suppose you tell me everything you know."

"I don't know a damned thing," I said, and lit a cigarette.

Tom said nothing, lighting a cigarette for himself. After a moment I was sorry I had lost my temper.

"You know how Miriam was, Tom," I said. "I don't have to explain how nasty and nagging and cheating she was. Well, things have been going from bad to worse with us until at last she told me she was filing for divorce."

Tom Carter blew a streamer of smoke, thought wrinkling his tanned forehead. "Did you tell the police that?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I didn't tell them

anything more than I had to," I admitted.

"All right, go on."

"Well," I had to force myself to tell this. "Miriam was cheating; she had a boy friend somewhere and I think she was giving him money along with seeing him a lot. That was one of the main things we fought over."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know. Oh, she was cagey, plenty cagey. She met him outside, never giving me an inkling as to who he was."

"And you don't suspect anybody?"

"Maybe Bishop," I said. "Lord knows he's hung around us enough. I tried to brush him off but Miriam liked him. We had enough to fight about without including him, so I let the matter drop."

Tom threw his cigarette butt on the floor. He scowled blankly at me, estimating and evaluating the situation. I watched anxiously, for I knew he was my only hope at the minute.

WE BOTH knew Bishop—a society tramp, who cashed in on his family name to get around. He was tall and blond and his tennis game was good enough to rank him high in the nation. But he never worked. He lived off his friends, somehow managing to remain a member of the better clubs, and to be seen at the better parties. I had never liked him.

"The police figure Miriam was shot about eight o'clock last night," Tom said at last. "Where were you at that time?"

I cast back in my mind. "At the Claremont," I said slowly.

"By yourself?"

I flushed. "With Betty. I met her just as I went in to dinner. We ate and then went down to the range. We were there until midnight. Any number of people can swear to that."

Tom Carter shook his sleek dark head. "That's bad."

"Bad!" I looked at him in surprise.

Tom nodded. "Look, Bob," he said. "I know you haven't been getting along with Miriam. It's common knowledge. But this dragging Betty into it isn't good. She's in love with you, you know."

"You're crazy," I said.

But I knew then that he spoke the truth. I had known Betty for years. We'd grown up together. I think she was the first girl I ever kissed. I suppose, the way things go, I'd have married her eventually if Miriam had not appeared, blond and dimpled and having a way with her that turned my head like a weathercock.

"The police will make her the motivation," Tom said thinly. "They'll say you murdered Miriam so that you could marry Betty."

"They can't do that!" I was standing, perspiration sliding down my collar. "By God, they can't do that to Betty!"

"And you're in love with her," Tom Carter said gently.

I sank back to the bunk. I knew then that Tom had struck the blind spot in my mind. I knew that his words had said only what I had never dared let myself admit.

I'd been in love with Miriam when we had married five years before. I'd been head-over-heels in love with her, swept away by her attentions, completely infatuated with her smile. I hadn't realized then that she hadn't loved me, that she had married me only because she thought that money went with my name.

I had told Betty, not realizing she was in love with me. In my masculine conceit, I had thought of her as just a good friend. She had congratulated me then, smiling out of dark eyes, and I had been content.

But now, thinking back, I realized how stupid I had been. Knowing how I could hurt her now, panic swelled in my mind. "All right," I said, "don't mention her."

Tom shrugged. "The police will ask a lot of questions," he said. "Maybe we can cover up and maybe we can't." His tone hardened. "You're sure you never left the club at any time last evening?"

A gate crowded open in my memory.

"Only when—" I shivered suddenly as though a cold breeze had walked up my spine "—only when I was ill and went into the men's locker room to lie down for a while."

"Alone?"

"Well, no. Bruce, the porter, was there."

Tom Carter frowned. "What time was that?"

"About eight or eight-thirty. I don't remember exactly."

The big cell was suddenly small and stifling. The trusty's voice came soft and insistent, ". . . . *over these prison walls I would fly.*"

* * * * *

LIEUTENANT OLIVER bulked solidly behind his desk. If there were disapproval in him over my temporary release under bail, he gave no indication. His gray hair was neatly brushed and his hands were as solid on the desk blotter as twin paperweights. His gaze went from Tom Carter to myself and then seemed to wander off into space.

"You're under bail as a material witness, Mr. Cummings," he said. "I think your attorney will describe to you just what the provisions of bail mean." His hand probed papers on the desk. "I have your statement here, which naturally will be checked."

"I can go then?" I asked.

"You can go," Lieutenant Oliver said gently. "There will be an inquest at ten tomorrow. I hardly think it necessary to serve you, to make certain you will appear."

"We'll be there," Tom said and I was grateful to him. Not many men would give up a vacation to return to work, particularly to something as dirty as this.

"Good!" Oliver's gaze swung back out of space and focused on us. "You may go now."

We left, taking the elevator to the ground floor. Cops looked up in professional disinterest as we went down the corridor to the outer doors. The sunlight was bright and hard after the semi-gloom of the building.

"We've got to talk this thing out," Tom said to me on the steps. "You're in one hell of a jam. We've got to clear up as many things as possible."

I shook my head. "Later—tonight," I answered. "I've got to see Betty and warn her to say nothing that will incriminate her."

"Listen, Bob," Tom Carter said harshly, "don't make things any worse than they are. Oliver's probably got tails on us now, this minute. You'll just drag her into this mess." He tugged at my arm, drawing me toward his Buick coupe down the street. "If you must talk to her, call her, use a telephone."

I looked up and saw that Lieutenant Oliver watched from the window of his office. I went cold, feeling his icy inscrutable gaze. He was still watching as I slid into the seat after Tom.

Tom shifted gears and slipped the coupe into traffic. The motor was powerful and we went ahead rapidly. Tom's face was dark and brooding over the wheel.

"We've got to get the porter's story," he said. "He'll vouch for the fact that you were in the locker room and didn't leave."

"All right," I said. I shivered, watching a blonde walk along the street. Her hips moved a shade too much and she carried her head as though listening for unheard sounds. Miriam had walked like that, conscious of every man she passed, supremely aware of herself.

Then a thought struck me, a vagrant memory. "How about Bishop?" I asked. "If he was playing around with Miriam he might know something."

Tom nodded, stopping the car for a traffic light. The corner patrolman glanced at us, then swung about, lifting his whistle. Traffic began to move again. Tom spun the Buick around the corner, idling along in the center lane.

I glanced at my wristwatch. "I'll take care of Bruce," I said. "Let me out at the club. You round up Bishop. Maybe you can trick him into talking. With me he'd naturally be plenty cautious."

"All right." Tom turned the car

down Seventieth Street. "But stay away from Betty. I'll ring her later, and maybe we can meet someplace." He drew the coupé to a halt at the curb before the Claremont Club. "Use your head now. Don't go off half-cocked. They may know about this here or they may not. Anyway it's your neck, so take it easy!"

"Yeah!" I said. Impatience was tugging at me. I slid from the seat and watched the car swing back into traffic.

Tom waved and then the coupé was gone. A few pedestrians stared incuriously and further down the street, two newsboys matched pennies with solemn concentration.

CHAPTER III

I WENT into the Claremont, letting the door swing shut behind me, savoring the cool dimness of the foyer. A bad painting stared at me with lacklustre eyes from one wall and silver trophy cups were dusty in a wall case at my left.

I went through the foyer, feeling my nerves tighten. It was as though the entire world knew what had happened and I knew meeting and talking to my friends would be hard. Luckily the lobby was almost empty. One member was at the shootboard, checking on cup entries and Ethel was at the small switchboard.

"Hello, Mr. Cummings," Ethel said. "Gee, I was sorry to hear—"

I cut her short. "Thanks, Ethel," I said. "Is Bruce, the porter, in?"

She shook her hennaed hair. "No, sir. Like I said, he hasn't been in all day." She leaned forward conspiratorially. "The police were here, checking up—"

"Yes, I know," I said impatiently. "Do you have Bruce's address?"

"Uh huh! He has the basement room at the Tremont Hotel. He's kind of an extra janitor and—"

"Thanks, Ethel," I said, and turned away.

I went back to the street, stopping in the afternoon sunlight to smoke a cigarette. I knew I had to talk to Bruce, but somehow seeing Betty was more important. She would be in one beautiful scandal if the police tried to tie her in with me.

I caught a taxi. I gave Betty's address and the driver nodded and shifted gears. I chain-lit a cigarette and leaned back, trying to puzzle out details.

I was no fool. I knew I was in this plenty deep. Lieutenant Oliver had me pegged for Miriam's murder. Right now he was pulling every string he could, uncovering all the details of my life, ready to pin a murder rap on me. Goose pimples dotted my skin at the thought. I tried to remain calm. But deep in my mind was the thought that he might be able to do that very thing.

I shivered. Heaven knew I could have shot Miriam to death. I could recall times when only sheer will power kept me from grinding her soft throat between my hands until her heart stilled its beating. Shooting would have been so very easy.

"You're a cheap punk," she'd said at one time. "I married you for your name and I'm going to walk up you like a ladder! I've already met a dozen who could buy and sell you with their cigarette money. Get white, get sore. On you it looks good."

That was only one occasion. There had been other times and other scenes. There were the charge accounts and the extra expenses. There were the trips and the expensive clothes. Not that I begrudged them. It was just that I didn't have any extra money, for every dollar was tied up in the business. I had tried to explain that to Miriam at first, thinking it was to her interest to know how things were. She had only laughed, knowing I would do nothing to humiliate her.

Yes, I could have killed her. The gun was mine, as was the deep desire. And I had the opportunity or so it seemed. I had been drunk the night before. I could have sneaked from the club's locker room, gone straight home and

shot her to death, then returned to the club for an alibi.

Yes, I could have done it. And because there was a blank space in my memory I could not completely convince myself that such had not been the case.

"Four-eighteen, Mac," the driver said.

I paid the fare and stood on the sidewalk for a long moment, wondering if Lieutenant Oliver had discovered this address. Remembering Tom's warning, I searched the street, trying to find lurking detectives or some car which might have followed my taxi. I saw nothing suspicious.

The door lock clicked as I waited after pressing Betty's buzzer. I went through and down the short hall to the lobby. A self-service elevator whisked me noiselessly to the fourth floor. There I knocked on Betty's door.

She had been crying; I saw that for her eyes were still pink. She held out her hands. I caught them tightly, wanting to draw her into the circle of my arms, yet knowing such was impossible.

"Hello, Bob," Betty said. "Come in."

I went past her, tossing my hat onto a magazine stand and dropping onto the couch. Paper rustled under the cushion. Drawing it out, I saw my picture on the front page, along with the headline SOCIALITE MURDERED.

THE paper hit the wall, unspringing from its wadded folds, cascading to the floor. I don't remember throwing it. The movement came and then the paper was on the floor.

"Bob!" Betty said but the cold rage was so naked and brutal and twisting in me that for a moment I didn't hear her voice.

"You see," I said and I knew my voice had raised to an almost hysterical pitch. "You see what she's doing to me. Even dead she's running me."

Betty slapped my face. Her hand struck one cheek and then the other. I gasped, shock driving rage from my mind. Then Betty was pouring a drink for me and I was holding the glass in shaking hands. The liquor calmed me. I realized then that I had needed that drink since early morning.

"Better?" Betty asked and I nodded.

"Thanks. I needed that." I put the glass aside. "I came to warn you. The police will try to tie you in with me, make it look as though Miriam might have been—killed so that . . ." I floundered for words.

"So that we could be married," Betty supplied.

I flushed. "The police have dirty minds. They might twist our relationship into anything."

"Oh." She nodded and sat beside me on the arm of the couch. Her hand touched my shoulder and was immediately withdrawn.

I knew then that Tom had been right. She was in love with me and I with her. There was a friendliness, a comradeship here such as I had found nowhere else. Betty wasn't pretty. Her chin was too determined, her mouth a bit too generous. But there were character and a gentleness that came warmly through every time she smiled. I wondered then how Miriam had ever seemed the most desirable person in the world.

"What happened?" she asked gently. "I read the paper but the story didn't give details."

I lit a cigarette. My mouth was raw from smoking, yet cigarettes seemed to calm me. Betty watched, seeing the slight tremble in my fingers, then poured another drink for me.

"It was horrible," I said.

I told her of finding Miriam in the bed, of how the bullet had torn a hole in the gold hair at her temple and then gone almost through her head, lodging just below the skin of her right brow. I told of touching her and feeling her stiff coldness. I told it all in a rush of words that I could not stop. When I was through she sat and watched me, whiteness about her mouth.

"How terrible!" she said, and there was genuine sympathy in her tone.

"The police think I did it," I said. "They let me go after Tom did some fast talking. But they'll pick me up again when they want me." I caught her hand. "Stay out of it, Betty. If they

ask you anything just say you saw me for a short while last night, and nothing else. I'll do the same."

Betty shook her head. "No!" she said flatly.

"Don't be a fool!" I snapped. "A scandal will gain you nothing; just play it as though we were more or less old frien—"

"I won't do it, Bob." I saw the first glimmer of tears in her eyes. "They'll find out I took you home about midnight. They'll find out we went together before you were married. Nothing good can come from lying."

"You brought me home?" I asked.

I felt small and contemptible then. Somebody had brought me home. I remembered that much. But who it was I hadn't know. Oh, I'd made a complete ass of myself.

And then memory opened another gate in my mind and I could feel the cold perspiration congealing along my back.

"I wish that target was Miriam's head," I remembered saying on the range. *"I'd put a bullet through her lying teeth."*

I remembered that and it was as though Betty read my mind. Her eyes were suddenly frightened, and her hand was tight on mine.

"I threatened to kill her," I whispered. "Everybody must have heard!"

Betty shook me, her grasp firm on my shoulders. "You were drunk, Bob, terribly drunk. Nobody can hold those words against you."

"But—" I fell silent, brooding, seeing my life crumpling like sand before the pounding of implacable surf.

It was then that Lieutenant Oliver thrust a stiff forefinger against the downstairs buzzer.

I KNEW it was Oliver as surely as if the buzzer had spoken his name aloud. Betty turned startled eyes on me, and then went to press the lock-button.

"Lieutenant Oliver," I said. "He followed me."

The seconds passed. Then knuckles sounded on the door, and Oliver came in as Betty turned the knob.

"Miss Masters?" he said. "I'm Lieutenant Oliver from Headquarters."

He saw me then, but there was no change of expression on his features. There was neither friendliness nor antagonism in his bearing, only a patience which was incredible to me.

"Come in," Betty said and he preceded her to a chair that was across from me.

WE EXCHANGED guarded nods. We were duelists, each cautious, each waiting for the other's first move.

"Mr. Cummings, of course, has told you the story," Lieutenant Oliver said finally. "My job is to run down each detail."

"She had nothing to do with this, Oliver," I said hotly. "For God's sake, must you tie *her* in too?"

The detective shrugged. "Mr. Cummings," he said, "you don't play quite according to the rules. I asked you if you were alone last night, and you said, yes. It now appears that Miss Masters was with you at Claremont Club. It also appears she drove you home about midnight."

Betty's mouth was firm.

"And—" she prompted, when he fell silent.

Lieutenant Oliver shrugged. "We have a strange situation here, I must admit. I—" He paused, and then pursued another line of thought. "Do you have a gray squirrel coat, Miss Masters?"

"Why, yes," Betty said.

"May I see it, please?"

"You want—of course, Lieutenant."

She left the room, walking with the grace which was hers alone. Lieutenant Oliver removed a note pad and fountain pen from his pocket. He had just finished writing a short note when Betty returned.

I remembered the jacket. Betty had worn it the night before. It was light and bulky, soft and warm, sleek furs lying in lines of beauty. She handed it to the detective and he looked it over

carefully, running his fingers deep into the pile.

"I shall have to take this with me, Miss Masters," he said. "I've written a receipt."

He handed her the small sheet of paper.

Betty didn't look at the paper. Her eyes were on the detective, puzzlement in their depths.

"I don't understand!" she said.

Lieutenant Oliver stood. "I had meant to ask a few questions," he said, "but since Mr. Cummings is here there is little need of that at the moment."

"Listen, Oliver," I said, "you're being pretty high-handed about this entire affair. What has Miss Masters' coat got to do with it?"

For the first time, I thought I saw the flicker of a smile lurking behind his frosty eyes.

"Didn't I tell you?" he asked. "There were hairs caught in Mrs. Cummings' clenched fingers—hairs from a gray squirrel coat."

He turned and, although he did not appear to move with any speed he was out of the apartment before either of us could speak. Only when the door was shut did we break the thrall which held us.

"Oh my God!" Betty whispered.

"Betty!" I came to my feet, holding her t i g h t l y. "Betty, you couldn't have . . ."

She was crying then, tight in the circle of my arms. She was like a frightened child and I was her bulwark for one long moment.

"Betty—" I began, and her words stilled my voice.

"You took my jacket into the locker room with you," she said. "You said you'd put it in your locker."

I turned and almost ran from the apartment.

I was shaking, agony in my mind, for I had seen the terrible belief growing in her eyes.

She knew, as Lieutenant Oliver believed, that I had slain Miriam and that some how her coat had played a part in the murder.

CHAPTER IV

I WALKED for at least an hour, not watching w h e r e I was going, blind to the city around me. I had a dim recol- l e c t i o n o f h o r n s squawking warnings at me on the street, and now and then of bumping some pedestrian, only to move on with a muttered apology.

Things were happeneing too fast for me. I had never had to cope with such a situation as this. And now that I was tied so tightly with it, I could not see it clearly and objectively as I could murder cases of which I read in the newspapers.

The terrible thing, of course, was the uncertainty about m y s e l f. Every moment it became clearer that I had killed Miriam. One clue piled onto another, both fitted into a third. And while everything was not complete yet, I knew that the implacable Lieutenant Oliver was building a case which could have but one ending.

I thought of Betty, trying to fit her and the squirrel coat into the affair. It was ridiculous even to hint that she might have shot Miriam. She was in love with me, true—but by no stretch of my imagination could I place her as standing over my wife, gun in hand, solving a problem with a brutal leaden slug.

That left me.

That was the picture and it was not a pretty thing. I had always considered myself rather stable, capable of handling anything and everything in my life. Now, I was not so sure. Everything was confused in my mind.

There was a sense of loss, too. For even if Miriam had lived in a house of hate our lives had been bound together for years. The sudden severance of the ties in such a horrible manner was not something which could be summarily dismissed.

I looked up and found myself in front of a cigar store. I put several nickels

on the small shelf and wedged myself into a booth and began dialing numbers. I didn't locate Tom Carter until the fourth call.

"This is Bob, Tom," I said finally. "Oliver followed me to Betty's place."

"Damn it, Bob," he said, "why can't you follow orders? This isn't a game you're playing. It's your neck at stake."

I scowled at the holed dial on the phone. "I know it's my neck," I said. "But even so he has no right to drag Betty into this thing!"

"Surely he doesn't suspect her?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything about anything. What am I to do, Tom?"

There was an interminable silence. "Take it easy," he said finally. "Meet me at my office in a couple of hours."

"Okay," I agreed, and hung up.

I caught a taxi. "Tremont Hotel," I said to the driver and leaned back in the seat.

I had made a fool play. I knew that now. As a result, Betty was mixed up in Miriam's death. True, Lieutenant Oliver hadn't really followed me to her apartment. His coming and demanding the coat made it clear he had checked at the club and learned she was with me. But even so, I hadn't used my head in going to see her.

I lit a cigarette, then scrubbed it out impatiently. Traffic whirled by and people moved and talked and laughed on the street. It seemed incredible that so much had happened in so short a time with the world uncaring and unknowing of what was happening to me.

The taxi stopped before the Tremont Hotel and, after paying the driver, I went around the corner, seeking the basement entrance. A few people were at the door and I pushed through to be halted suddenly by the outthrust arm of a uniformed cop.

"Where you think you're going, Mac?" he asked.

"Inside," I said impatiently. "I've got to see a man."

"Who are you?" the cop asked and then turned as a bulky man came to the door.

"Let him in, Frank," Detective Simpson said.

Shock touched me lightly. But too much had happened already for surprise to overwhelm me about anything. I went past the cop, following Simpson.

"What's happened?" I asked.

Simpson spat silently. "What are you doing here, Mr. Cummings?" he countered.

I swallowed heavily. "I came to see Bruce, the porter at the Claremont Club. He can give me an alibi for last night."

The detective stared at me. *"Can* he now!" he said shortly.

THERE were other people at the doorway of a large room, more cops and some who were evidently from the hotel. Simpson pushed through and I followed. Two men in white coats were lifting a body to a stretcher.

I gagged, horrified. The man was Bruce, his face and neck cherry red, his hands floppily limp.

"There's the porter," Simpson said, and shrugged. "Looks as though your alibi is shot to hell!"

"What happened?" I choked.

"Gas! The medical examiner says he was drunk too. Probably got plastered and then kicked the hose off the heater." He scowled. "These damned fools who won't use pipe!"

I could smell the faint echoes of gas lingering in the air. Simpson was watching me. Nausea touched my senses and he put his hand on my arm.

"You okay?" he asked.

"I'm all right," I said.

An idea struck me then, an idea so simple and perfect I couldn't understand why I had not known it before.

I said, "This is murder! The same person who killed my wife murdered Bruce. He got him drunk and then pulled the hose off the heater. I tell you that's the story!"

"Come again," Simpson said.

"It's plain I've been framed," I said excitedly. "The killer did this so that Bruce couldn't give me an alibi for last night."

The detective shook his head patronizingly. "Who?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "That's your job, to find out who the killer is."

"Oh!" Simpson scratched his nose. His eyes on me were cold and without expression.

I shook his arm. "Can't you understand?" I cried.

Simpson nodded. "I understand," he said. "Now, suppose you trot along to Headquarters and tell your idea to Lieutenant Oliver. He'll do something about it. Jim!" His voice raised. "Jim, see Mr. Cummings to the street."

A patrolman took me by the arm and led me outside. I stood in the street, late sunshine brushing my face and fully undestood then how stupid I had been. Simpson knew who had murdered Miriam; he knew it as well as Oliver did. And the fact that I had tried to drag an accident, a coincidence, into part of my wife's murder was just another count against me.

I laughed suddenly, without humor, conscious that passersby watched and circled me warily as they passed.

I turned away and went down the walk, seeing the utter futility of everything. I was near the bank where I had my account and automatically I went that way. I was no fool. I saw the road which lay ahead. There was but one thing to do.

Three minutes later the bank official looked at me out of curious eyes and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cummings," he said. "But until the court order is lifted you can make no withdrawals."

I mumbled my thanks. This was Oliver's doing. I was free. I could come and go. And yet I was bound more tightly to the town than if I had been locked in a cell. In all probability a detective was following me, recording every movement I made. Lieutenant Oliver would know within minutes that I had tried to draw enough money to make my escape.

Fear puckered my heart. This was a subtle sadism against which a man could not fight. There was something diabolical in Oliver's machinations. He had freed me, permitting me to roam the town, yet he was closing all avenues of escape, drawing his net tighter with every passing hour.

I felt harried and hounded and for one wild moment, considered giving myself up and confessing if only to end the uncertainty. Then I felt a surge of anger. All right, so I had killed Miriam —she deserved it! Let them pin the killing on me. I wouldn't help them, one way or another. After all, I had the right to live, law or no law. With Tom Carter defending me, it would take a damned good prosecutor to convict me of anything.

A car stopped beside me for a red light and Detective Simpson waved from the front seat.

"I'll tell Oliver what you said," he called. Then he was gone and I was standing on the corner, hating him. . . .

EVENTUALLY, I went to see Leighton Bishop. Why, I do not know, other than that I suspected him of being Miriam's boy friend. He could have killed her. I'd seen him a couple of times in a vicious mood and I knew he was capable of murder. And despite my conviction that I had shot my wife, a nagging thought lay in my mind that I could be wrong.

Miriam was a fool. She hadn't known when to stop pressing a man. She could have played Bishop for a sucker only to have him turn on her in reality as I had long wanted to do abstractly. He could have come to our home the night before, while I was gone, and there murdered her. It could have been that simple.

When I passed out in the locker room he could have sneaked out, killed her and then returned, not necessarily to pin the murder on me but just because I wouldn't have too good an alibi. I had been snoring my head off on a cot in one of the private cubicles where members rest after shooting and showering.

I stood outside of his apartment house and wondered for the thousandth time where he got his money. The building was sleek and smooth with a uniformed

doorman in front. He looked down his nose at me as I approached, but held the door open subserviently.

Inside I rang Bishop's apartment, only to find that he was out and would not return for some time. I cooled my heels in the small waiting room just off the lobby. I was past thinking, so I just tried to relax while I waited. Almost an hour passed before Bishop came in.

"Come on upstairs," he said, none too graciously.

We didn't talk in the elevator. In his apartment Bishop tossed his coat and hat on a couch and immediately mixed drinks. I shook my head. Leighton Bishop was nervous so I tried to run a bluff, not really expecting to gain a thing by it.

"Miriam told me she was giving you money," I said bluntly. "I wanted to hear your story before going to the police."

Ice tinkled in his glass. "She gave me some," he admitted. "But I paid it all back days ago."

A muscle quivered in his cheek. Suddenly I sensed his fear. "You're a louse, Bishop," I said. "You accepted my friendship and at the same time made a play for Miriam."

He licked his lips. His yellow hair was too smooth, his nails too shiny. He looked as if he had just come from a beauty parlor.

"I swear to you, Bob—" he began.

I crowded him. "Miriam's dead," I said, "and the police are trying to pin her murder on me. Maybe they'd think differently if they knew a few facts about you, particularly about your playing around with Miriam."

He was sweating, perspiration beading his face to match the sweatbeaded glass in his hand. His eyes were frightened and some of his sleekness had disappeared.

"I had nothing to do with it, Bob," he said. "The police know that. I've just come from there. They had me on the carpet for a couple of hours."

"And you told them about last night?"

"What else could I do? Good Lord, I wasn't the only one who heard you threaten your wife's life. Other members of the club heard the same thing!" He was suddenly ugly. "They know you did it and I know you did it, so don't try to pass the blame to me." His voice rose hysterically. "I don't know why you're out now. They asked enough questions about you."

I came closer. Bishop backed away, his drink forgotten, sidling along the couch.

"Miriam had other friends," he said. "How about Tom Carter? She saw him often enough. They were together yesterday afternoon. I saw them at the Paradise Bar out on the Highway."

I turned away, not because of his words but because I was sick of his cringing. I went to the door and passed through and took the elevator down to the street level.

CHAPTER V

BISHOP'S words haunted me but they made no sense. Of course Tom had seen Miriam. They were the best of friends, not as Bishop had tried to insinuate, just friends. They had gone together before she married me but Tom's and my friendship had continued with neither of us letting my marriage throw us apart. I had even urged Tom to substitute for me when I was unable to take Miriam places.

I almost laughed. It was only too obvious, wild as my theories might have been, that Bishop hadn't the nerve to have murdered Miriam. But that Tom Carter could have done it was absolutely beyond belief, if for no other reason than that he was fifty miles away when she was killed.

I stepped from the apartment house and a man walked slowly to my side. I tensed, knowing this was the detective Lieutenant Oliver had had following me ever since my release.

"Mr. Cummings," the detective said,

"I have a message for you."

"What?" I asked. I wanted nothing more than an excuse to knock him down.

"Lieutenant Oliver said to tell you the post mortem disclosed that your wife was unconscious from a knockout drug when she was shot. Furthermore, he said to tell you that Bruce Peyton was also drugged before he died from asphyxiation."

"But—" I began.

Tipping his hat, the detective went rapidly down the street, ignoring my calls for him to halt. A moment later he stepped into a small sedan, sending it into the growing evening traffic.

I didn't get it. Why should Lieutenant Oliver have such a report made to me? What kind of a game was he playing now?

I whistled for a taxi. There was only one thing to do—talk to Tom and let him handle things from here on. I hadn't got anywhere. I'd just bumbled along, gaining nothing.

Traffic was heavy. Fully ten minutes passed before I arrived at the office building where Tom had a suite of three rooms. People were scurrying past, hastening homeward from work.

I went to the fourth floor, entered without knocking and passed the empty switchboard on my way into Tom's private office. Tom was sitting at his desk, feet canted on the polished surface. His eyes swung to the door, as I came in.

"Where have you been?" he snapped. "I've been waiting for you."

"I've just come from Bishop's place," I said. "He spilled his insides to the police. I don't know everything he said, but he did tell about my threat to kill Miriam."

Tom shook his head. "That's bad," he admitted. "What about the porter?"

"He's dead."

"Dead! Bob, you did—"

"It was an accident," I interrupted savagely, reading the thought in his unfinished sentence. "He got drunk and pulled the hose from a gas heater. The police were there when I arrived."

"Oh!" He played with a letter opener while I sank into the heavy chair opposite the desk. "Bob, this is hard to say, but it seems the most logical thing."

"What?"

He flushed. "I talked to the D. A.," he said, "and he's pushing for a fast trial. I talked with the police and they've got a case which can't be beaten. As your friend and your lawyer I'm advising you to admit shooting Miriam. I suggest you make a deal with the D. A. and take a second or third degree sentence. At least that will save your life."

"You're crazy!" I roared. "They'd put me away for years!"

Tom Carter nodded. "I know," he said, "but there isn't much that either of us can do. I tell you frankly that you haven't a ghost of a chance at winning if the case goes to court." His hands went flat on the table. "I don't like it any more than you but I'm giving you the best advice I possibly can."

"No!" I shouted, hammering on the desk. "I'm not going to do it. I don't know if I killed her. Maybe I never will. But I am not going to talk my way into a cell for the rest of my life!" I lowered my voice, aware that I had been shouting. "It looks to me as if you were working for the police, wanting me to do that."

"Calm down, Bob," Tom said. "Make your own suggestion, if you have one."

I WAS silent then. I had no suggestions, no ideas. I was completely drained of everything but a growing fear like that which I had felt when I touched Miriam's cold body.

"Bob," Tom Carter said gently, "I was both your friend and Miriam's. You know that. If I had seen either of you yesterday before I left for the lake I might have sensed this thing you did was coming. I might have prevented it. But since I didn't the best I can do is try and save you as much trouble as possible."

I went around the desk and stood at the window. Maybe there was merit to Tom's words but at the moment I could not see it. The prospect of a lifetime

buried behind stone walls was sickening.

I heard a match strike and cigarette smoke drifted toward me. But still I stood, thinking, getting nowhere. And then a thought intruded, nagging, insistent. I watched Tom's reflection in the window glass.

"When did you see Miriam last?" I asked.

"Oh, two or three days ago. Why?" Smoke plumed from his cigarette.

I whipped about. "You're lying, Tom. You're lying! Why? What have you got to hide? *Did you kill Miriam?"*

I thought he would attack me for a moment. He flushed, and then all color drained from his face. The cigarette broke, sparks scattering to the floor, and his heavy hands clenched on the chair arms.

He was big and handsome then and it suddenly came to me that I had never realized the fact. I had just taken him for granted. Yet he was just the type of man for whom Miriam would make a play.

"I won't take it, Bob, friendship or no friendship!" Tom said. "I don't have . . ."

"Bishop saw you, Tom," I said. "He saw you and Miriam at the Paradise yesterday afternoon." A second thought came. "Of course, you saw her. In jail you mentioned my inheritance, yet the telegram came at noon, and I spoke of it to no one."

He was very calm, controlling himself by superb will power. He bent and retrieved the broken cigarette, placing it meticulously in a desk tray.

"I saw no point in telling you, Bob," he said slowly. "I was trying to help you and you would just have been hurt if you had known she talked to me. She wanted me to go to court and force you to turn the inheritance over to her, using any legal trickery I could. I turned her proposition down."

I said nothing. There wasn't anything to say. His answer was logical and my accusation had been made through fear and Bishop's vindictive words.

"I saw her about two o'clock, Bob," Tom Carter explained further. "We had a couple of drinks and then I drove up to the lake. That's all there was to it. I'm sorry you lost your head for a moment."

"Yeah!" I said, but I was thinking.

What could have prevented him from driving down early the night before, killing Miriam and then driving back? Ostensibly he would be at the lake. Actually he could have been committing a murder.

"You need a drink," Tom said and came from his chair.

He passed me, going to the small portable bar in the corner, lifting the lid and finding bottles and glasses. I stared blindly at the traffic in the street, coming back to the present only when he thrust a glass into my hand. The liquor was good and I drank, feeling its faint warmth. The whiskey seemed to clear my thinking a bit.

"Look, Bob," Tom said then, "if you need any further convincing that I had nothing to do with Miriam's death, call Bear Lake. Half a dozen people are still at my cottage."

"All right," I said and reached for the phone. I put a call through, avoiding Tom's gaze, yet watching him surreptitiously.

TOM CARTER watched, sipping at his drink now and then, his gaze speculative as it centered on me. I felt a sense of shame but my life was at stake and I was passing up no leads at all.

"Hello!" I said, when the connection was made. "Who's speaking? . . . Oh, Judge Cranford! Well, this is Bob Cummings, Judge, and I wanted a bit of information. . . . Sure. . . . Well, could you tell me if Tom Carter was at the lodge all of yesterday evening, say from five o'clock to ten? . . . He was? . . . You're sure? . . . Oh, cleaning guns and getting ready for today's hunting . . . All evening together, the entire group? . . . No, no thanks, just checking something. Thanks."

I hung up. "Sorry!" I said to Tom, and finished my drink.

"Forget it," Tom said. "I don't blame you for going off half-cocked. I would too in your place. Now let's get back to what we were discussing."

"Anything you say, Tom," I said and wandered to the window again.

I was through fighting. There was no point in bucking the inevitable. Let Tom handle everything from here on in. Miriam was dead and I was labeled her murderer. The police knew it, Tom knew it and there was little room for doubt in my mind.

I could see into the office across the street. Some girl was still at her desk, bent over a pocket mirror, wielding a lipstick. My memory tricked me, and suddenly I was remembering Miriam's waxen face, mascara still black about her eyes, her lips scarlet slashes.

"Something?" Tom asked.

"I was just thinking about Miriam," I said. "She looked sort of pitiful, her gown twisted and lipstick smeared a bit."

It hit me then. I had one answer. Lipstick, mascara and Miriam in bed! No woman went to bed with makeup on, least of all Miriam. She was utterly vain. Creaming and sponging her face were nightly rituals.

Tom was mixing more drinks and I accepted mine automatically.

"What is it?" Tom said.

"Makeup," I said. "Miriam was in bed but she still had makeup on. The killer put her in bed after she was dead."

"Why would he do something like that?" Tom's tone was patronizingly skeptical.

"I don't know," I admitted. I went about the desk and sank into the heavy chair again. "Tom, this is screwy. I just remembered how Miriam was lying. She was shot from the side and behind, yet the killer couldn't get behind the bed for it was against the wall. She was killed somewhere else."

"You're crazy," Tom said softly.

"She was drugged before being killed. Oliver told me that," I went on. "And so was Bruce, the porter. Oh, he was murdered, too. That's only too plain to see. He was killed so that he couldn't give me an alibi. Somebody was making damned certain I got the chair for Miriam's death."

"You're getting drunk," Tom said.

I shook my head. The liquor had hit me hard but I wasn't drunk yet.

"I'm not drunk," I said. "I'm just getting things straight. Somebody drugged Bruce and then murdered him by leaving him in a room filled with illuminating gas."

My memory was playing tricks again, spinning and whirling. But at last I managed to still it, finishing the last of the drink and setting the glass on the desk. The whisky had blurred my eyesight and I had trouble setting down the glass without dropping it. My voice seemed to come from a deep well.

"When I asked for Bruce at the club," I said, "Ethel answered me in a funny way. She spoke as though I had asked about Bruce before. Somebody must have called and asked about him, maybe even pretending to be me." I laughed a bit, feeling the whisky numbness in my lips. "The police can check that, at least."

Tom Carter shook his head. It swayed before my eyes like a swelling balloon. I hadn't realized I was so drunk; this was almost as bad as the night before. *Squirrels,* I kept thinking, *little gray squirrels—dead!*

"You're just talking, Bob," he said. "You're making wild guesses. You haven't brought out a thing which would hold up in court."

"There's Miriam," I said. "I don't know much about death but she was curled up on the bed as though cramps had struck her. The police should be able to make something out of that."

"Rigor mortis does strange things," Tom said and his voice was a floating string of words hovering in the air.

"And there's the squirrel hair caught in her fingers," I said.

"Squirrel hair!" Tom Carter was a midget barely three inches tall or else I was looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars.

"Sure, squirrel hairs." I could feel my laughter but not hear it. "Oliver

thought—thought they were from Betty's coat. But he was wrong."

CHAPTER VI

SUDDENLY Tom was at my side and I realized I was half asleep in the chair. My head was resting on the leather, my hands in my lap. I yawned, blinking to keep awake. I felt calm and relaxed and it amused me that I could see the entire pattern now after a couple of drinks.

"He was wrong?" Tom said insistently.

"Of course," I said, head dropping for a moment. "They were from your Buick, Tom, from the luggage compartment. You had Miriam in there, didn't you, Tom?"

The room spun gently. The air was warm, and I was sleepy. It amused me to see the shock in Tom's balloon face. It amused me and I began to laugh.

Tom Carter slapped me. He swung his pillow hand and the tap was like being stroked with a feather.

"Who've you told this to, Bob?" his voice was a booming bell hidden deep in a cavernous temple. "Who've you told this to?"

"Nobody," I said. "I just figured it out. How and why did you do it, Tom?"

You're a killer, Tom, I kept thinking. *I figured out your little scheme. You're in my power, my power!*

I saw death in Tom Carter's eyes.

I saw it and then I knew what was happening. Miriam, then Bruce, and now me. I tried to rise, but my hands wouldn't move and my feet were still on the rug. Only my eyes moved and they were held on Tom's face.

"You're right, Bob," Tom said, "I killed Miriam and Bruce. Miriam gave me a brush-off yesterday. She told me to go to blazes after she found out about the money you've inherited. I killed her then—not literally, you understand. That didn't come until later. I doped her drink and then helped her to the car. Outside of town, I forced more drops down her throat and shoved her into the luggage compartment of the car. Then I went on up to Bear Lake.

"I didn't leave the lodge all evening. But I killed Miriam at eight o'clock. I just stepped outside to try my twenty-two rifle. Once outside, I went to the car, opened the compartment and shot her through the head. It was that simple."

He stopped for breath and I managed a single word.

"Why?"

"Because if I couldn't have her, nobody else could. She wasn't yours. She never was. She gave your money to me." He laughed softly, without humor. "Yesterday she wanted that money back."

I was whirling in a vacuum of nothingness. Whatever Tom had used in my drinks was powerful. It had hit me incredibly fast.

"Bruce?" I asked.

"I knew he wasn't at the club. I went to him, after dropping you. I doped his drink, then pulled the heater hose." His head swayed alarmingly. "I had nothing against you, Bob, you understand that. It was just a case of self-preservation. Anyway, I figured I could get you off. But you had already built a circumstantial case about yourself. I just made it a bit better."

There was a gun in his hand, a sleek .22 Colt Woodsman.

"This won't hurt, Bob," he said, "and it's a lot faster than the chair. I'm sorry, Bob."

I saw the gun coming up. I made one final effort to tear myself out of the drug's power and failed. I saw the gun come higher, felt the cold metal brush my forehead.

"No, Tom!" My scream was a whisper.

"I'll clean the back of the Buick. I never thought about the squirrels I carried there on my last trip."

He hesitated. Even after two murders it must have taken panic or cold nerve to do what he planned to do.

"I was at the lodge, Bob," he said, "until one in the morning. Everybody was asleep. I drove into town, found you dead drunk in bed. I undressed and put a gown on Miriam. Rigor mortis had frozen her the way she was found the next day. I put the gun, your gun—Miriam was carrying it in her purse—on the floor and then left. I was back at the lodge by four o'clock and my alibi was perfect. When Miriam was killed I was with half a dozen respectable people, fifty miles from the supposed scene of the crime."

He cocked the gun, the noise sounding faint and far away. The muzzle touched my temple. Then flame crashed into my brain, flame and the racketing roar of shots. I went sideways, blasted by the slug, and knew no more. . . .

THE hospital was very quiet. I lay in the narrow bed and counted the cracks in the white plaster on the ceiling. My head throbbed but the nurse had jabbed a needle in my arm and smiled professionally. After she was gone, I felt better.

"So that's the way it was, Mr. Cummings," Lieutenant Oliver said from where he stood at the window. "I'm sorry I let the thing go as long as I did."

He was all in blue—suit, tie, shirt and sox. Even his gray eyes had a tinge of blue in them. Today, they were not as icy as they had seemed to be before. Despite everything I felt a glow of friendliness.

"Mind going over it once more," I asked. "I missed some of it."

"Well, like I said," Lieutenant Oliver explained, "we knew your wife hadn't been killed in the bedroom. There was no blood on the pillow, not even dried. Her body was drawn up unnaturally. And while it was not conclusive she still had makeup on.

"We figured you had killed her some place else, then set a scene. That was why we let you go, figuring on following you until you made a slip of some kind. When we found the squirrel hairs in her hand we thought some woman might have helped you. That was why I obtained Miss Masters' coat. However, our laboratory discovered the few hairs were comparatively fresh and untreated, unlike those of a fur coat.

"Yet even with the odd situation, you were tagged for the killing. Then the post mortem showed your wife had been drugged. Later the porter was killed and you made a rather sensational charge. A fast pm showed the same drug had been used on him. We got a different idea then.

"In checking your friends we found that your wife had had one particular buddy, Carter. By adding the squirrel hairs, coincidental alibi and a few other facts, we made out a case against him. The only thing which stumped us was his alibi.

"Narrowing the murders down to you and Carter, I had a detective give you specific information, thinking it would throw one or the other of you into a panic. I followed you to Carter's office and listened at the waiting-room door. I still figured you for the murderer and intended to step in and make an arrest, the moment you confessed.

"However, you brought up a chain of reasoning plus a few facts I didn't know. You went too far and Carter made a killer play. He intended to shoot you and then claim you had confessed and shot yourself, rather than take a chance on getting the chair.

"I had to wait until the last second to hear the final breakdown of his alibi. Even with what I had heard I couldn't figure out how he could be in two places at once. I waited and then shot. His bullet grazed your head. I didn't kill him. He'll live to get the chair. You'll be out of here in a day or two. That's about it."

I sighed. "That's enough," I said. "Then you didn't suspect me too much?"

Lieutenant Oliver shook his head. "Not too much," he agreed. "Particularly when we checked your movements and got the time elements. But we couldn't take chances. We let you go free, trying to panic you into a mistake. Our plans worked but in a different way

than we thought." He hesitated. "I'm sorry we had to do it that way. But our job is to catch crooks, not coddle suspects."

"Forget it," I said.

We shook hands and then he was gone, square shoulders erect, his eyes smiling at me as he turned a moment before going out the door. I relaxed, closing my eyes.

The nurse came in, fussing at the covers over my chest. I didn't look at her.

I was wondering where Betty was now, wondering what the future held in store for us—if there ever would be a future for *us* now that this agony was over.

The nurse kissed me.

I blinked, astonished. I opened my eyes. I saw her then, standing over me, unshed tears in her eyes. She wasn't pretty but I knew I could never tire of her features. Somehow underneath, there was beauty there.

"Betty!" I said.

Then she was in my arms and I was holding her tight. I was whispering her name over and over again. Somehow the future looked very bright and promising and my eagerness for it to arrive was something which would never die.

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LITTLE MAN WHAT THEN? or SMALL'S FIRES BURNED TOO BRIGHTLY

by LEO MARR

FREDERICK SMALL'S troubles may have dated from the time he broke his leg playing baseball in his native town of Portland, Maine. Small was a little man and the resulting limp, which afflicted him for the rest of his life, managed to render him more diminutive than ever.

Psychologists these days speak fluently of inferiority complexes and the train of complicated behaviour patterns which follow a condition of physical inferiority. Perhaps this was true of Frederick Small. Being a little man was bad enough—being crippled as well soured him on life. Certainly he failed in the grocery business shortly after his accident.

Yet, complexes and limp notwithstanding, he seemed to have had no perceptible difficulty in attracting the interest of the opposite sex.

Perhaps he appealed to their maternal instincts.

At any rate, in 1890, when he was 23 years old, he met, wooed and won a more or less fair damsel whose name was Nettie Davis. Whether this marriage was happy or not is, regrettably, unknown. Mrs. Small died in childbirth a year later and the bereaved Mr. Small shook the dust of his native town forever from

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Flames played an important part in Frederick Small's life, and they finally lit his way to the hangman's noose when the authorities caught up with him!

his feet. It can get mighty dusty in Portland.

In 1899, in Everett, Massachusetts, he married for the second time. The bride was Laura Patterson of Salem. The blissful couple resided in a number of North Atlantic towns, including Hudson and Somerville, and for a time Small devoted himself to playing the stock market in Boston. Although his successes or failures in this highly speculative field do not seem to be a matter of record, it would be interesting to know how his luck at gambling compared with his luck at love.

In 1908 the great game of baseball again crossed his life line as his cup of bliss went dry. With much show of indignation he brought suit for alienation of affections against one Arthur H. Soden, former president of the Boston Nationals. Soden, stated Frederick, had appropriated the affections of Mrs. Small, presumably with malice aforethought.

"And five hundred thousand dollars is little enough to ask," he added.

A Boston judge, with raised eyebrows, commented audibly on the market value of Mrs. Small's affections and reduced the damages to $10,000. This delightful bit of haggling was unfortunately halted when Soden made a settlement at an unrevealed figure and Mr. Small was enabled to win an uncontested divorce. Mrs. Small departed for New York and out of Frederick's life, luckier than she ever realized.

IN THE meantime, Frederick, apparently crushed by his burden of sorrow as well as by the weight of his pocketbook, retired to the country to rest at the farm of a family named Curry, near the village of Southboro. Ten days thereafter he married Miss Florence Arlene Curry, after a whirlwind courtship. The time was December, 1911. The bride was 32 the bridegroom, 44. No hermit was Frederick.

They lived in Southboro for nearly three years. Then they moved to a lake resort in New Hampshire, a tiny hamlet on the shores of Lake Ossipee called Mountainview. A curious and possibly significant thing then occurred. The day after they left a fire destroyed their old house in Southboro.

This was the second time that fire, like baseball, had entered Frederick Small's life. The first occasion was in 1900 when he was still married to his second wife. A fire had driven them from their home in Hudson in the middle of the night. Pure accident maybe, but the sparks seemed destined to follow Small's limping progress all through life.

In 1914, and perhaps even yet, Lake Ossipee was a remote and untrammeled spot, with deep woods all around a single, indifferent dirt road serving the few scattered cabins and boys' and girls' summer camps. Yet deliveries of groceries were made from nearby Mountainview and there was even a horse-drawn cab service run by the proprietor of the Mountainview hotel for those who had to catch a train. It offered a peaceful existence amid scenes of natural beauty, a setting to soothe a troubled spirit and allay the fevered complexes of little men who feel themselves ill-used by the world.

Frederick Small was nearing fifty now. He was lame and he had failed at many things. Yet he had a wife, apparently devoted to him, and a substantial sum of ready cash. He bought the cottage in which they lived, he bought a motor boat and rifles and fishing rods, skates, snowshoes and skis, an organ, a violin, a phonograph, checkers, chessmen, furniture and books.

His wife had jewelry worth—so he said—$6000. And after paying for all this he still had $5000 in a Boston bank, plus a safety deposit box containing some securities. It would seem that he had not done too badly. Moreover, his lameness was not so bad that it interfered with his outdoor activities.

He spent long days out on the lake in his motorboat or tinkering with its engine. Without doubt he was an excellent mechanic. He had a good workshop and did his own motor repairs. In addition, he was always tinkering with

electrical apparatus and hooking up Rube Goldberg contraptions, such as the one for illuminating the face of his clock at night by pressing a button.

He was especially proud of this ability. On one occasion he is reported to have said, in the hearing of a neighbor, raising his hand in the air, "That hand can make anything."

And now the plot begins to thicken. The pleasant country stage was set. With husbandly concern, Frederick Small began to think of the future and the planning which should be done. He telephoned an insurance agent named Winfield Chase, of Mountainview.

"I should like to discuss some insurance with you," he said.

Mr. Chase was delighted. He had already insured the cottage for $3000, but this was a trifling sum and he was most happy to learn that Mr. Small was a man of vision. He came to see Mr. Small and the two men discussed the terms of a $20,000 policy insuring jointly the lives of Small and his wife.

However, Mr. Chase's company, the Travelers', apparently did not offer terms to suit Small, for he called in an agent of John Hancock Mutual, of Boston. This agent, Edwin Connor, sold insurance as a sideline. The bulk of his time was occupied by his duties as principal of the Centre Ossipee school.

MR. CONNOR and Mr. Small hit it off handsomely and a policy was drawn up which undertook to pay $20,000 to the survivor in the case of death occurring to either Mr. or Mrs. Small. The thoughtful Frederick had intended this as a surprise to his wife, so did not inform her of it.

But the John Hancock Company objected to his signing her name on the document—a fuddy-duddy intolerance which grieved him. So he was forced to tell her after all and get her own John Hancock on the dotted line.

This kind of policy was far from inexpensive. The yearly premium was $1107.60, or approximately 25% of Frederick Small's known cash balance, a matter of no little significance later.

Between Frederick Small and Edwin Connor, principal and insurance agent, there sprang up a state resembling friendship. Small could be convivial when he desired. He stocked a good cellar of wines and whiskies, he played chess and checkers and he liked to make an occasional trip to Boston on business, or at times to see a play or a moving picture.

By the end of September the last summer visitors had left the lake and the Smalls were in solitary possession. The place was lonely now for Florence Small with even her few neighborly contacts gone.

Small and Connor had made an engagement to go to Boston together the first week in October. Small had several prospects for insurance which he proposed to turn over to Conner, for a cut of the commission.

On the 28th of September Small phoned Connor at the school.

"I should like to go to Boston today, instead of next week," he said. "The way the market is going I should be there. And if you come along we can take care of that insurance business. There's a train at four-seven. That's after school closes and you can easily make it."

"But this is so sudden," Connor protested. "Why didn't you tell me yesterday? I haven't made any preparations. I can't rush off like this!"

"Why not?" Small insisted. "It's only for one day. Can't you get away somehow?"

"I don't see how. But if I can manage it, I'll phone you."

At one o'clock Connor called back and said it was impossible for him to go. Mr. Small was disappointed.

"I thought we could take care of those insurance prospects," he said. "It means a nice piece of change for both of us."

"If I can make it at the last minute I'll meet you at the train," Connor promised.

The afternoon passed uneventfully. The grocer drove his team out to deliver an order at the Small cottage. This was

about eleven in the morning, between the two telephone conversations. At this time Florence Small was definitely alive, for the grocer saw her and talked to her.

At two o'clock, after the second conversation with Connor, Frederick Small phoned the hotel and arranged for Mr. Kennett to pick him up and drive him to the station. Punctiliously, Small told him to come at precisely 3:30 in order to make the 4:07 train.

Mr. Kennett found time hanging rather heavily on his hands since it was the end of the tourist season, so he came early—at about 2:45. There was a certain little ritual about these calls which he remembered pleasantly—a ritual of stepping inside for a snort—which perhaps he envisioned as being somewhat prolonged if there was time to spare.

If so, he was disappointed. Early as he was, Frederick Small was standing on the porch and waiting for him with his bag at his feet. The happy little ritual was omitted, despite Mr. Kennett's thirsty wetting of his lips with his very dry tongue.

Kennett had picked up Small's mail from the box at the end of the road. He handed over the letters and Small, after glancing at them, opened the screen door and tossed them inside. Then he stepped partly through and called out cheerfully, "Good-by!"

He came out, closing the door behind him, and climbed up into the carriage. The dejected Mr. Kennett clucked to his horse and they moved away.

At the railroad station Mr. Small was cheered to discover Connor. The teacher had finally decided to go.

THE trip to Boston took four hours and they spent the time agreeably enough in the smoker and in the diner where they had a leisurely dinner and a bit of rye. In Boston they registered at the Young's Hotel. Then they sauntered up to the Parker House where Mr. Connor bought some picture postcards and Mr. Small promptly cadged one from him.

The card has been preserved, and its message illustrates point two in the building of an alibi:

Fair weather at Young's.
Fred
Sept. 28, 1916, 8:40 P.M.

"My wife and I are always very exact," Mr. Small said, showing the message to Connor.

Having mailed the cards, the two men sauntered up Tremont Street and, coming to the Majestic Theatre, yielded to the attractions of an early moving picture titled "Where Are My Children?" This cinematic gem purported to expose the twin evils of seduction and abortion, and the two cronies spent the next couple of hours being either educated or shocked.

They got back to the hotel at midnight and were immediately flagged by the night clerk.

"Mr. Small, there's a message for you. They've been trying to get you on the telephone from Mountainview. There's been a fire up your way."

So came the third fire in Frederick Small's life. With visible agitation he went to the phone booth and called Mountainview.

"Mr. Small," said the hotel keeper, "I have bad news for you. Your home is gone and we can't find your wife nowhere. I'm sorry, sir, but do you know where she might be? I'm afraid she is in the ruins."

"My God!" cried Frederick Small. "My wife—my home! I am lost! Frank, you don't mean it!"

"I wish I didn't, Mr. Small. But you must face it. Your home is gone."

Dazedly, Small turned to Connor. "Ed," he pleaded, "Please come here and take this. See what this man means."

Connor took the phone and got the story. "We'll come as soon as we can hire a car and driver," he promised.

Helplessly, Small wept, sitting tiny and crushed in the lobby, while Connor arranged for a car. Then they went up and packed hastily. Small dried his eyes and asked bravely:

"Do you think there will be any trouble with Merritt?" Merritt was the general manager of the John Hancock Mutual.

They came back to Mountainview at half past four in the morning, in the blackness that precedes dawn. Mr. Small could not bring himself to go immediately to the site of his destroyed home. He went to the hotel where he managed to choke down some breakfast and phone Mr. Chase of the Travelers'—the insurance company which had covered him for fire. At 6:30 he and Connor drove out to the cottage.

It was all gone except for the corner which had been his workshop. The fire had burned with incredible fury, more like a blow-torch than an ordinary blaze, and many of the surrounding trees had been killed. But seepage from the lake had left several inches of water in the cellar and, despite the heat, a number of objects were thereby preserved. One of these objects was the corpse of Florence Curry Small.

Mr. Small had put on rubber boots. Standing somberly in the water and sour smelling ashes he remarked, "There are six thousand dollars in diamonds in here somewhere. Anyone who finds them may keep them."

The partly consumed corpse of Mrs. Small was lifted out. Though her arms and legs were nearly destroyed, the head and trunk had been quite well preserved by the water. And certain indisputable evidence was visible at once.

First a thin cord was tightly twisted about the woman's throat. In the doctor's opinion this was sufficient to cause death by strangulation. There was also a bullet wound in the head. And lastly, the skull had been crushed by at least eight heavy blows with the well-known blunt instrument.

"The murderer of this woman was nothing if not thorough," an examining doctor said grimly.

The medical referee, Dr. Horne, asked Small what should be done with the body. Small was taken aback.

"You mean there is enough left to be buried?"

"There is," said Dr. Horne, regarding him queerly.

Small pulled himself together. "We must get a casket," he murmured. "The best for her—only the best."

Later, he actually ordered a casket for $35, as though regretting his first extravagant impulse. But he threw in $24 worth of roses with a ribbon bearing the message "To My Love" and somewhat tearfully prevailed upon the pastor of the Centre Ossipee church to conduct the funeral service.

ALL this heart-rending activity was rudely interrupted by the sheriff who entered to announce that Frederick Small was under arrest. The law was not going to overlook the fact that Mrs. Small had been strangled, shot and bludgeoned to death. After all, how could it?

"Why, this is outrageous!" protested Mr. Small. "My wife was alive when I left the cottage yesterday. And I have a witness—Mr. Kennett."

"Yeah?" said the sheriff.

"Yes," said Mr. Small. "When we were leaving she came out on the porch and kissed me good-by. And Kennett heard her say, 'Don't forget the lace.' "

"Did I now?" said Kennett when the sheriff asked him. "I heard Small call out 'good-by' to her, but I don't recollect her answering him and I'm certain sure she didn't come out and kiss him good-by. Maybe his calling out good-by to her was supposed to make me think I saw and heard what I didn't. But I know what I did see."

Mr. Kennett may never have read a book on psychology, but he was positively uncanny.

Faced with the ominous charge of murder, Frederick Small remembered three men—unnamed—who hated himself and his wife enough to kill her. He also brought up the ubiquitous "tramp," who must have blundered upon the cottage and, finding a woman alone, murdered her for her money or jewels and fired the house before fleeing.

The discovery of a blood-stained towel in a boat seemed to help this

theory and caused a brief flurry of excitement until it was well established that a fisherman had cut himself while rowing in a boat.

The trial began at Ossipee just after Christmas of that year. Boston newspapers sent special correspondents and artists to Ossipee to cover the trial which had crowded the war in Europe off the front page. One of these writers described Small as "a little gray-faced man with a shrunken leg, a long nose, pale blue eyes with bags under them."

He was, in the main, a pathetic figure, small, helpless, gray and haggard, "the most unfortunate, unhappy looking individual who ever faced the charge of murdering his wife."

The jury and the prisoner were taken out to visit the scene of the crime. The snow was deep and a freezing rain was falling. The prisoner sought to match the elements by bursting into tears. He leaned against one of the sleighs, sobbing like a child. The rain froze upon his bent frame as he stood there, once more crushed by grief at the harshness of Fate.

In court he was himself again, conferring with his attorneys, listening with cool alertness to the testimony.

The State had little trouble in finding a motive for the crime. The $20,000 in insurance stood out like a lighthouse. And among Small's effects was an amazing document—an inventory of the cabin's furnishings down to the last tiny detail, all with prices neatly attached. There was even an item of "candy" for $1.40 and the prosecutor made much of this.

"Would so transient an article conceivably be entered on a permanent inventory?" he asked. "Clearly this was an inventory specifically made up for some purpose. And what other purpose could there be than presentation to the insurance company? And why should this be done—unless the owner has good reason to expect that a fire is going to take place?"

The State trotted out some witnesses to reveal that Mr. Small's feelings for his wife were not always in line with the message inscribed on the roses which served as her funeral wreath. Neighbors named Emerson testified that they had played cards with the Smalls and that Mrs. Small, having made a small blunder, was reprimanded by her husband in language which broke up the game.

This might be commonplace amongst modern bridge players but the Emersons were unused to such language and they retired in confusion. As they left they heard a scream from the cabin and debated a moment whether to return, but decided it was none of their business.

Another witness, a handyman named Davis who had done some work for the Smalls, testified that Small had lost his temper with Mrs. Small and kicked her. When she spoke pleadingly to him, he said:

"Get into the house. I'll settle with you later!"

Davis also described going for a row on the lake with the Smalls. Mrs. Small rowed and let the boat run aground. She tried to push it off, but was unable to do so. When Davis tried to help her, Small stopped him. Finally, the husband picked up an oar, but not to help. He used it instead to administer discipline to his erring wife. At this point, Davis said, he took the oar away from Small.

There were many stories like these. One witness testified that he had heard Small say he had to beat his wife "with an axe." Another swore that he had heard Small threaten to kill the woman. Others reported that, passing the Small cottage on the road, they had often heard Mrs. Small screaming.

The dead woman's mother took the stand to relate how adept Small was in tying knots—like the reef knot tied about Florence Small's throat. But she, after all, was his mother-in-law.

FROM the Smalls' former home in Southboro came a physician, Dr. Bacon, who told a story cut from the same pattern. He had once received a call to come to the Small house. When

he rang the bell no one answered and he pushed the door open and went in. He had found Mrs. Small sitting in the kitchen in a state of shock, her face covered with blood. The gray-faced, limping husband was there, too. He had shouted angrily:

"Who sent for you?"

"Someone called me," the doctor answered.

"Well, it wasn't me. You can get out of here."

"I did not go," Dr. Bacon said, "and Small picked up a stick from the wood box and advanced threateningly upon me. I did not care for his attitude in the least, so I picked up a kitchen chair and splintered it over his head. He fell down and, though he was not unconscious, he remained on the floor, glaring at me, while I treated Mrs. Small's face."

When he had completed his ministrations he asked Mrs. Small what had happened. She was apparently too unnerved or too frightened to answer. But from where he lay, Small yelled:

"I hit her with a bootjack! I'd like to kill her and I will one of these days!"

As Dr. Bacon repeated these words, the defense attorney leaped to his feet with an objection. The judge overruled him and the statement was allowed.

Nothing could have been clearer than the medical testimony. Strangulation was the immediate cause of death. The cord was identified as the starter cord from Small's own motor boat. The bullet—a .32—was from Small's .32-calibre Colt. The blows on the head could not be placed so accurately, but there was a poker in the ruins and they could have been made by a poker. An autopsy placed the time of death at about one in the afternoon.

Here was the first great test of Frederick Small's alibi. His claim was that he left the house before three, at which time his wife was still alive. She must have been killed late in the afternoon or evening.

And this alibi hung upon the testimony of Mr. Kennett, who had come to drive Small to the station. Did Mr. Kennett see or hear Mrs. Small at 2:45 or not?

Mr. Kennett had not and no amount of badgering by defense attorneys could make him say he had. The cleverest link in all that chain was, after all, the weakest, when opposed to the staunch unimaginativeness of a New Hampshire Yankee.

Now the State's big guns were rolled up. Produced as evidence were the charred and battered, but still recognizable items of a devilish machine. It had dry batteries, wire, an alarm clock, spark plugs and a gasoline can.

"Here, gentlemen of the jury," the prosecutor stated, "is the heart and soul of this nefarious crime. The prisoner tells you he cannot be guilty because he was in Boston, hours away, when the fire broke out in his cottage. But here is the contrivance by which the fire could be started eight, or even twelve, hours after he was safely away!

"See—the alarm clock can be set for any desired time. Here are the batteries, the coil of wire, the spark plugs and the deadly can of gasoline! What could be more revealing of treacherous intent!"

The fire had broken out about ten o'clock, which was at least seven hours after Small had left. Men from Mountainview, coming out to fight it, found the heat so terribly intense that they could not even approach the cabin.

"This was no ordinary fire," the prosecutor went on. "The heat was so intense that the floors burned through and let many things fall into the cellar. Mrs. Small's body was apparently on a bed upstairs. As the floor burned, the bed and the body fell through and landed upon the living room stove which was just underneath. These in turn, all fell into the cellar and by blind fate, into the water which had seeped in from the lake."

HE HELD up pieces of the stove. "The metal is actually *melted,* gentlemen. No ordinary fire would do this. There was a slaglike residue, and I have had this analyzed. Mr. Wedger, would you tell the jury what this slag-

like material is?"

Mr. Wedger, chemist for the Massachusetts State Police, was most explicit.

"This slag is the result of the combustion of thermite, a substance which generates a heat so intense it is used for welding steel rails. You will better understand this when I tell you that the heat from a wood fire reaches eight hundred degrees Fahrenheit, but a thermite fire rises to fifty-four hundred degrees."

The point here, bitterly contested by the defense, was that thermite had been used to insure complete destruction of the body. However, the intense heat caused the floors to disintegrate more rapidly, thus dropping the body into the cellar, where the water had partially protected it.

Throughout all this legal jockeying, Frederick Small had not taken the stand, nor did he do so now. Summing up, his lawyer, Mr. Mathews, dwelt upon Small's carefree behaviour in going off to Boston with Mr. Connor. Was this the behaviour of a man with murder heavy upon his conscience, Mr. Mathews wanted to know? Were his subsequent breakdown, his honest grief and helplessness the actions of a guilty man?

The jury was not impressed. They went out at eight and brought back a verdict at eleven.

"Guilty in the first degree, with capital punishment."

The reporters rushed the prisoner for a statement.

"I am innocent," he said.

Next morning, when the judge asked him if he had anything to say before sentence was passed, he repeated the phrase.

"You will be imprisoned in the State prison at Concord until January fifteenth and on that day you will be hanged by the neck until you are dead."

And so Frederick Small was hanged. His conviction was entirely upon circumstantial evidence—no human saw him commit the deed. His alibi was good, his arrangements close to perfect. The whole structure was ruined by the stubbornness of a Yankee countryman and a few inches of water in the cellar. He was a man who played with fire once too often.

The Amazing True Story of an American Bluebeard!

HERMAN MUDGETT'S BUDGET

or

The Case of the Murdered Typewriters

By LEO MARR

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NEXT ISSUE!

CHAPTER I

THEY were looking for Raymond Stuart. "Thirty-three years old," the first detective said. "Five feet seven and a half. One hundred and thirty-five pounds."

"A little guy."

"He looks bigger than he is." The detective's name was Krug and his partner, who had been sick with a cold for several days, was Jones. "This Stuart is a rather good looking little cuss," Krug went on. "Dark. Lean faced. A natty dresser. He walks with a slight limp. His left leg is bent a little between knee and ankle. Polio when he was a kid. But you won't notice it much. He notices it more than you do."

"What do you mean?" Jones asked.

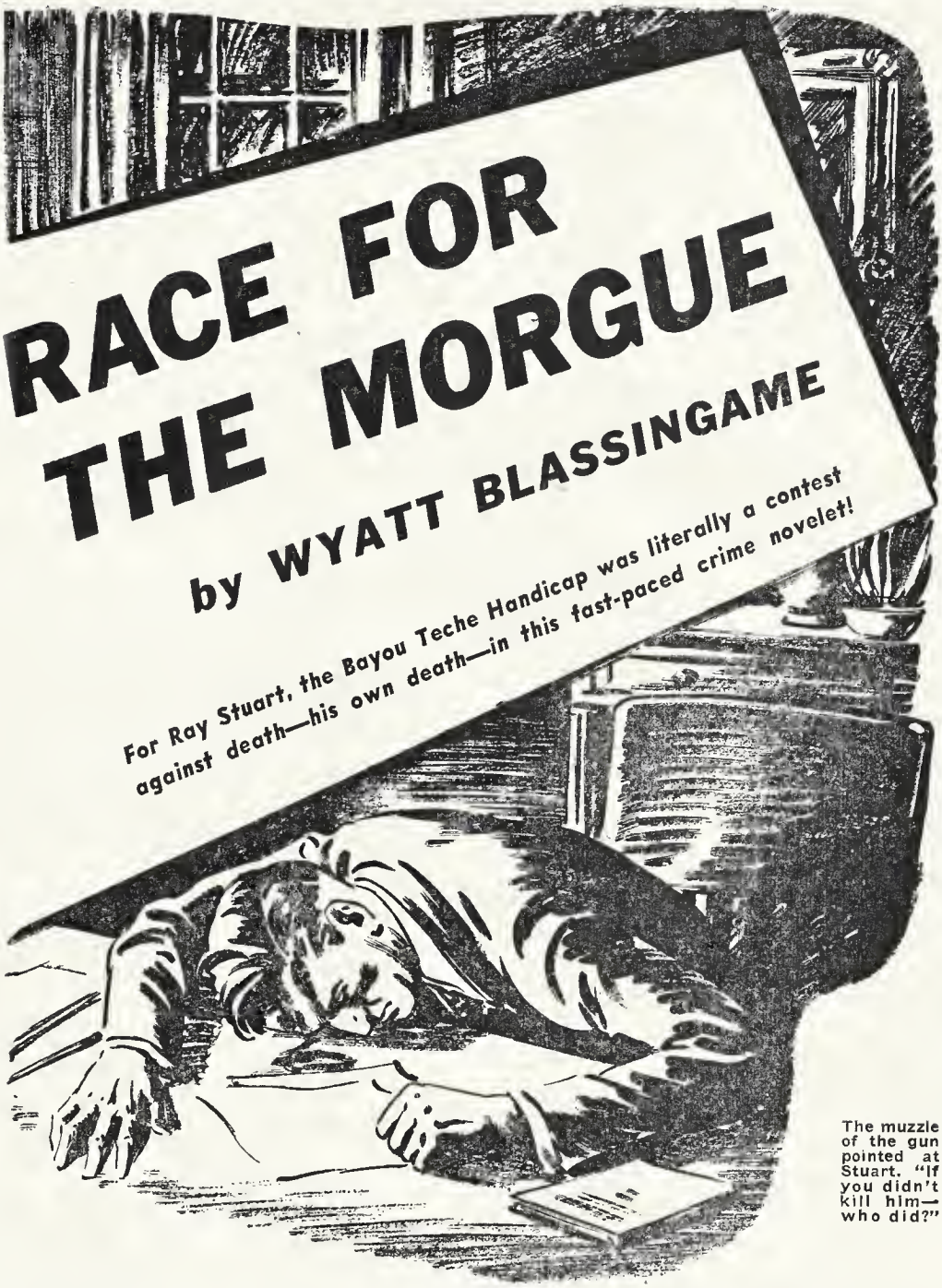
"That bad leg has changed the man's whole outlook on life. Maybe it's the reason he went in for horses when he was young. He was small, with his weight in his shoulders and arms, and he made a good jockey. I remember when he was riding. He had a feel for horses. I think that because he himself couldn't run he identified himself with the racehorse. It did something to him to ride a winner."

Jones spat tobacco juice at a cuspidor, missed, and gave a snort of disgust. But it was not apparent whether his

RACE FOR THE MORGUE

by WYATT BLASSINGAME

For Ray Stuart, the Bayou Teche Handicap was literally a contest against death—his own death—in this fast-paced crime novelet!



The muzzle of the gun pointed at Stuart. "If you didn't kill him—who did?"

disgust was caused by missing the cuspidor or what Krug had said.

"When Ray Stuart got too heavy to ride," Krug said, "he bought a small string of horses, platers, and he's done pretty well with 'em, too. He's made a business of buying up the horses that have been hurt, that other persons had given up on, and making something out of them.

"Even when he was riding he liked to do that—to take the horse that had

something wrong with him and work with him, and make something out of him. You see, it's because of that bad leg—associating himself with the horse. The psychologists—"

Jones snorted again. "You and psychologists. You been nuts ever since you read that book."

"I read more'n one book," Krug said with dignity. "Two, and part of a third one."

"Any of them tell you why a fellow that's always been honest, as you say this Ray Stuart has been, should suddenly haul off and bash in a man's head with a poker?"

"No—unless it's the bum leg. Something like that could thwart a man's personality." Krug stood up. "Anyway, Stuart did the killing. His prints are on the poker. He was caught with the body. The dead man had a button of Ray Stuart's coat in his hand, and I told you Stuart is a natty dresser. He wouldn't be going around with loose buttons. And he had a motive."

"So all we got to do now," Jones said, "is find Stuart. Where do we start looking?"

"At the track. I been haunting the place ever since he took a powder right after the killing. But that's where he'll be and where we'll find him sooner or later." Krug opened the office door and they went along the corridor of the police station and out into the wind and sunshine of a March day in New Orleans. The police coupe was at the curb and Krug crowded his big body under the wheel.

"You know," Krug said, "I won a lot of money on that lad when he was riding. You could trust him. When his horse lost it was just because the horse wasn't good enough to win. I'm kinda sorry he did that killing."

Jones said, "They don't pay you to be sorry. Let's go find him."

RAY STUART sat in the dark feed-room of his barn at the Fair Grounds. The place was warm with the smell of horses and hay and leather and sweat. He could hear the sound of horses in their stalls. Voices came and went. The March wind made a whimpering at the eaves. In the gloom the dial of Stuart's watch had a greenish glow. Four-thirty, and the horses should be at the post for the sixth race.

Just twenty-four hours before the Bayou Teche Handicap, with Redtop running. Stuart wanted to see that race. It meant a lot to him because of the way he had worked to bring Redtop along and to have him ready. But if he stuck his nose outside in daylight, with the place swarming with cops—!

For the hundredth time his mind went back over what had happened. He went over it minute by minute, groping for some other answer than the one he always got—and didn't want to get. Remembering put a coldness in his chest that was more than fear. He was afraid, but the feeling went beyond that.

It was horror . . . .

The house was on Moss Street, fronting the Bayou St. John. There was a high iron fence with a heavy gate, and when Stuart pushed on the gate his hand slipped and a button on the cuff of his coat made a clicking noise against the iron.

He felt, and found the button was now held by a single thread, and might fall off at any moment. What was the old phrase, he thought, about a man's life hanging by a single thread? Smiling at the idea he pulled off the dangling button, put it in his coat pocket.

The walk wound between banked azaleas and the odor of them was sweet upon the night. Stuart noticed and enjoyed perfumes. Somewhere in the garden there were roses blooming and he could smell them through the azaleas even though he couldn't see them.

There was a big brass knocker on the door. He knocked, and the door opened almost immediately, spilling light into his face.

"Hello, Mr. Stuart. Miss Crane isn't home."

"I came to see Mr. Hepburn tonight, Ramsay."

The butler was a short, plump man who seemed to have dedicated his life

to disproving the statement that fat men are jolly. The heavy folds of his face had a sagging, downward look, like those of a St. Bernard. That sad, sour expression was the only one that ever showed on his face.

"I'll tell Mr. Hepburn you are here," he said.

Stuart waited, wondering why Ward Hepburn had a white butler in New Orleans, where white servants are rare. And wondering too why Hepburn had asked him to come here tonight. He knew the man only slightly.

Ramsey came back. "Mr. Hepburn is in his study."

"Thanks, Ramsay." He pointed a thumb at the hat the butler was carrying. "You going out?"

"Yes, sir. To a movie."

"Good night, Ramsay."

"Good night, Mr. Stuart."

This house on the Bayou St. John was well over a hundred years old. There was the feel of time and wealth and slow decay upon it. Ward Hepburn's study might have been the study of his grandfather, with nothing changed except that the desk lamp burned electricity and not kerosene.

It was a shaded lamp throwing the light down onto the desk and leaving the dark, paneled walls in gloom. But a fire burned in the huge fireplace and the light of this touched in spots upon the walls, and wavered over the dark, massive furniture.

Ward Hepburn said, "Come in, Mr. Stuart. It's a bit chilly out tonight."

"It's the wind," Stuart said. "Off the lake, and damp."

"A drink?"

"Thanks."

The decanter was cut glass and as old as the house. The whiskey was good. Hepburn took his neat and moved over to stand in front of the fire, a slender man with a handsome, spoiled, sullen face. He seemed to be having some trouble finding words for what he wanted to say. Ray Stuart sipped his drink, watched him, and waited.

"You met Janis at some Canadian racetrack this past summer, didn't you, Mr. Stuart?"

"Yes," Stuart said.

Hepburn came back to his desk and sat down. He rubbed his hands together. He said:

"Are you in love with Janis, Mr. Stuart?"

It was a question Ray Stuart had asked himself more than once—and he wasn't sure of the answer. He knew that Janis Crane fascinated him more than any woman he had ever met. It stirred him, excited him to be with her. And yet he had never felt any great tenderness toward her. Perhaps, he thought, it was because she did not need tenderness. She was too beautiful, too wealthy, too self-sufficient.

HE TOOK the button from his coat pocket and began to flip it. "I am very fond of her," he said after a while.

Hepburn cleared his throat. "I am responsible for Janis, you know. Don't smile. Of course, I'm not a great deal older than she is, but I am her uncle. The family money was left to me, and I'm to look after her."

Stuart said n o t h i n g. The fire crackled softly in the grate. And it was then that Stuart heard a noise in the hallway. He turned to look at the door, but saw nothing.

"It's the hall closet," Hepburn said. "This house is old and the wind blows right through it."

"It sounded like a step," Stuart said. But this was only a casual remark, forgotten as soon as it was made.

Hepburn reached for the decanter, poured himself another drink. He drank it, said, "How much would you take to get out of town, Mr. Stuart, and leave Janis alone?"

The button Stuart had been flipping struck the desk and bounced and lay there, shining under the light. Ray Stuart stood up. His hands were flat on the desk and his shoulders forward over them.

"Wait!" Hepburn cried. "Now wait! Don't misunderstand me!"

"Perhaps I did."

"I—I didn't mean that as an insult." Hepburn's face twitched and grew still. He said, "I don't want you to get angry, Mr. Stuart, but there's something I've got to say. You're a racetrack man. You've a reputation for being honest—I've asked questions about you—but I don't think you're the man for Janis. For one thing, you're ten to fifteen years older than she is."

"Ten," Stuart said.

"Janis comes from one of New Orleans' oldest families. She's wealthy—not in her own name, of course. The money's mine, Mr. Stuart, but she's my only relative. She's spoiled and impulsive. And she thinks she's in love with you."

Ray Stuart did not move. But the anger had gone out of his face. It was blank now.

"Janis and I have talked about it," Hepburn said. "I've asked her to stop seeing you for a while, to give herself a chance to think straight. She refused. So I want you to leave town for a month. Stay away and not let Janis know where you are. If she's still in love with you after that, I won't object. Is that too much to ask, Mr. Stuart?"

"I can't leave town. I have horses at the track. I have one running in the Bayou Teche Handicap on Saturday."

"And if it won, how much would you get?"

"About ten thousand. It would be the biggest purse I ever pulled down as an owner."

"What chance do you have of winning?"

"About one out of five."

"I'll give you ten thousand to leave town tonight, tomorrow at the latest, without any word to Janis, and stay away for a month."

Stuart turned from the desk. He wasn't thinking about that offer, because he couldn't take it. But he didn't blame Ward Hepburn for making it, either. He went over and lifted the big iron poker at the fireplace and punched absently at the fire. Then he put the poker down and turned back to Hepburn.

"I can't leave town," he said. "I've got my horses and I'm not—"

Hepburn interrupted. "You've a man that can look after them. That old Negro of yours. And the jockey that rides for you."

"I see you've been checking on me," Stuart said, and the smile was faint and bitter on his dark face. "But I'm not leaving my horses, Mr. Hepburn. However, I'll promise you not to call Janis in the next month, to stay away from this house, to avoid her as much as possible. Will that do you?"

"Certainly not! You know how Janis is. She won't leave you alone. You'll have to go where she can't find you."

"When the Fair Grounds closes I'm leaving. Not before."

"But—" Hepburn looked at Stuart's face, and stopped. "All right then. You don't hold any grudges, I hope?"

There was a sound from the hallway again, the sound Hepburn had said was a windblown door.

"No grudge," Stuart said. "Goodnight, Mr. Hepburn."

CHAPTER II

IT WAS, as nearly as he could r e m e m b e r, nine-thirty when he left the house. Within a few minutes of that, anyway. He went down the walk where the odor of azaleas and roses mingled on the March wind. He pushed open the iron gate and went out. Moss Street was dark and here the wind had the damp smell of the lake and of the Bayou St. John. It was quiet, except for the wind, and he heard a fish jump in the bayou.

He walked toward Esplanade, going slowly, his shoulders bent a little, the limp scarcely noticeable.

There was no warning. As he stepped off the curb, about to cross the street, he saw the car. Evidently it had been parked there and was just beginning to move. It showed no light—that was the

first thing he noticed—but he thought that it was because the driver had simply not yet turned them on. There was a street light on the far corner and against its glow Stuart felt sure he was visible.

Then he noticed the sound of the engine, the swiftness with which it accelerated. And at the same moment he recognized the car. It was his own car which he had left parked in front of his apartment building a few blocks away! A second later he realized that whoever drove this car intended to kill him.

He whirled to leap back for the curb. His bad leg gave slightly. It seemed to him that he was motionless. He was like a man falling through space and struggling to climb on empty air. He was off balance and turned so that he could see the car roaring down upon him.

He saw the dim glow of the street light waver over hood and windshield. He could see the blur of the face at the wheel, and he felt a shock as though the car had already struck him, knowing that he had seen that face before but not in the instant remembering, not recognizing it. And he saw the glow of something like a green light above the blurred face.

Then the car struck him. He was already in the air, diving for the curb. His left hand hit the car's fender. It was like a broken field runner trying to stiffarm a tackler. Then his arm smashed back against his side and he was spinning through space. The street light was a moon gone crazy. The night revolved in roaring darkness.

He was never completely unconscious but it was like a dream, like the memory of some ether-caused nightmare—the scream of tires as the car made the turn into Moss Street—the blur of it beyond the light and backing into the light again—and he knew that the driver was coming back to finish the kill, while he lay there in a bed of soft, whirling darkness and could not move.

The car backed toward him, backed through the light, huge and hideous-looking. From where he lay he could not see the driver and it seemed as though the car were some monster animated by its own will and creeping toward him. The car came into the darkness near him, and stopped.

Then the car moved away again. It glowed under the light, and was gone into darkness. And Ray Stuart lay there for a small eternity before he heard the voices, men and women, laughter. Two couples passed along the sidewalk, passed within a few feet of where he lay. He realized dimly that the driver must have seen these people coming and been afraid to stop.

The couples passed on. Stuart got to his feet, reeling a little. His legs held him. His vision was clearing and he realized he was in a flowerbed close to the sidewalk. The soft earth had cushioned his fall.

He found he could walk and he headed for a drugstore just off Esplanade. His thinking was still as shaky as his legs.

"He meant to kill me!" he said half aloud. And the words ran like a refrain over and over through his mind. He meant to kill me! He meant to kill me!

It was hard for him to believe. The average person, walking quietly along a city street, cannot expect deliberate and planned murder. There was no reason for anyone to want to kill Ray Stuart. And yet—it was the second attempt in twenty-four hours! The other attempt had been almost identical, except that the car had not actually struck him. He had jumped back to the curb in time, decided it was some drunk who had not seen him, and forgotten the incident. But now tonight—

HE COULD remember the blur of the face behind the windshield. And the other thing he had seen, what was it? For a moment he could not remember. He tried to picture the thing all over again—and then, as if he could actually see it, he remembered: a green shimmer of light above the face. A green, glowing eye that looked at him and winked light as the car roared down upon him.

In the washroom at the drugstore he

found that the back of his left hand was cut, his face scratched. There was a massive bruise on his left hip and other bruises on elbows and shoulders. He ached all over, but he could walk.

The druggist put iodine on the cuts. "You ought to call the cops," he told Stuart. "Too many drunks driving like crazy around this city."

"Only I don't know who it was. I got a glimpse but I—" He stopped. For the first time he remembered that he had recognized the car. It had been his own car. At least he had thought it was. But could he be sure? He had left it parked in front of his apartment, and that was only two blocks from here.

He left the drugstore, walking fast now, the limp more noticeable. His suit, so neatly pressed and clean a short while before, had mud and grass stains, and somehow the soiled suit seemed to accentuate the limp, to make him look smaller and older than he had looked before.

His car was where he had left it that afternoon. But the keys were in the ignition, and he was fairly sure he had left them on the table in his living room. Anyone could have gone in and got them. He rarely locked the door.

He sat there on the front seat of the car and tried to figure it out. Twice in two days someone had tried to kill him. And without any reason that he could imagine. He was not wealthy. He had a half dozen horses and together they were worth somewhere between twenty and forty thousand dollars. But his will left everything he had, or might have, to the infantile paralysis fund.

Redtop was developing into a good horse, and he would have a chance at the Bayou Teche Handicap. But it was no better than a five-to-one chance, and the favorite, Blue Bonnet, was owned by a millionaire breeder who didn't even bother to come to the Fair Grounds or to send his really top horses here, and who probably wouldn't know about this race until he saw it in the papers.

Stuart looked at the clock on the dashboard and was surprised to see that it was only nine fifty-five. Only about twenty-five minutes since he had left Ward Hepburn's house. Somehow, it seemed to him that hours must have passed.

Could Ward Hepburn have been behind these attempts on his life? Could Hepburn want him killed because he had refused to go away and not see Janis? But Stuart couldn't believe that. Anyway, the first attempt had been made before Hepburn even spoke to him about Janis.

He glanced at the clock again. The figures on the clock were in green and glowed in the light. Like that green glow above the blurred face in the car!

And then he remembered. A man named Tom Bosard at the track always wore a cap with a long green celluloid visor. That visor, caught in the dim glow of the street light, might have been what he saw! And the face might have been Tom Bosard's! He couldn't be sure, of course. But he had thought he recognized the face. It might have been Bosard.

And why should Tom Bosard want to kill him? For that he had no answer. Bosard worked as a sort of assistant trainer, swipe, general helper for a man named Bill Graves, who owned a string of horses about like Stuart's. Graves had a horse named Dangerous, a rank outsider, running in the Bayou Teche Handicap on Saturday. Stuart had owned this horse once and sold it to Graves. But there were a lot of horses in the race, and it wouldn't do an owner any good to eliminate one other owner.

He realized that in trying to find some possible reason for what had happened he was groping among absurdities. But there was still a chance that it might have been Bosard who drove the car. Certainly it had looked like him.

"I'll talk to him anyway," Stuart said aloud, and turned the keys in the ignition.

THE tackroom in Bill Graves' barn was lighted, the door open. Graves sat there with his feet on a table beside a liquor bottle, a glass in his hand. He looked up, saw Stuart standing in the

doorway, said:

"Hello, Ray. Come in. How are you tonight?"

"Where's Tom Bosard?"

"In Dangerous' stall. He's afraid the hoss is catching cold. That's why he called me over. I don't think it's bad, though. Why?"

"Has Tom been here all evening?"

Graves took a sip of his drink, looking over the glass at Ray Stuart. Graves was a big man with a bald head and a brow that bulged into a ridge above his eyes. His nose was big, his mouth almost colorless.

"As far as I know, he's been here," he said. "He phoned me about fifteen minutes ago to come over. What's wrong?"

Stuart heard steps and turned. He could see the figure, dark against the dark barn. The man came toward him, said, "Hello, Ray," and went past him into the lighted tackroom. It was Tom Bosard, wearing the cap with the long green visor. To Graves he said:

"That hoss has got a cold all right. He ain't going to run Saturday."

"We'll have to wait and see," Graves said. "I don't think it's that bad." Under his ridged brow his eyes moved from Tom Bosard to Stuart. He said, "Ray wants to know if you've been here all night."

For just an instant Bosard hesitated. He was a thin man with a furtive, almost animal air. But his mouth fit tight against his teeth and there was cruelty in the shape of it. He had been known to tie a horse and lash it with a rubber hose before a race in order to excite and stimulate it. He worked any and all angles, and there are a lot of them around a race track.

After a bare moment he said, "Sure I've been here. Why?"

"Did anybody drop by? Anybody who could prove you were here a half hour ago?" Stuart asked.

"I don't have to prove where I was," Bosard said angrily. "Why should I?"

"Somebody tried to run over me. I didn't get much of a look at the person, but it looked like you."

"Why the hell should I want to run over you?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," Ray Stuart said. "Good night."

CHAPTER III

HE WASN'T sure why he went back to Ward Hepburn's house. Even now he couldn't be sure of that. Because he couldn't actually believe that Hepburn had wanted him murdered. It was just that he didn't know where else to go. And he was afraid.

You realize suddenly that somebody is trying to murder you. And you don't know who it is, or why. But they have tried twice, so there is reason to believe they will try again, will keep on trying until successful. And there is no way to stop them because you don't know which way to turn.

It could be someone waiting for you in the darkness, or the man standing under the street light at the next corner and whistling softly. It could be the person you consider a friend. Or it could be someone you have never seen, a madman whose motive is known only to his own insane mind. You can be sure of only one thing—that someone is hunting you like an animal, to kill.

Stuart rapped the knocker against the great oaken door of Ward Hepburn's house, and waited. There was no answer. Perhaps, he thought, the knocker was not audible in Hepburn's study, and Ramsay, the butler, was gone. So Stuart tried the door. It was unlocked and he went in.

The big hallway was dimly lighted. A spiral staircase coiled upward and he went past this, along the hall. Light showed under the door of Hepburn's study. Stuart knocked, and at the same instant his nostrils wrinkled slightly. There was the faint odor of perfume and he thought, Janis is here. He pushed open the door and went in.

He went two steps over the threshold, the second step taken slowly, as though

he had waded into liquid air and frozen, his legs still spread. His nostrils were wide as though he were still enjoying the odor of the perfume. His lips were parted and the firelight made the lines of his cheek and jaw look hard and tight.

Ward Hepburn sat in the chair at his desk. But his body leaned forward so that shoulders and face touched the desk itself. His head was in the white glow of the downward sloping light of the desk lamp and the blood that had oozed from the two great dents across his skull looked black with purple edges. His arms spread out across the desk, the right hand open and flat, the left hand clenched. On the floor was the iron poker which had stood beside the fireplace.

There was no one else in the room. Nothing but the faint crackle of the fire, the sweet, soft odor of perfume.

"Janis!" he called softly. "Janis!" The sound of his voice faded out and there was no answer. And then he heard the front door open. There were voices, steps along the hallway. Stuart moved backward so that he could watch the door of the study.

The butler came through the door. He saw Stuart, nodded, and then turning his face toward the corpse at the desk, said:

"Mr. Wilson Massey is here to—" His voice thinned out like smoke and disappeared. The color went out of his face. His mouth worked. His eyes bulged toward the dead man.

Then his face moved, came around slowly so that he was looking at Stuart again. From his working mouth there came a sound, half scream, half howl like a dog in pain. He swayed back, his shoulders hit the wall and he slid down it and lay stretched out upon the floor.

There was another man in the doorway now, a man Stuart had never seen before. He was a big man, about forty, with hair gray at the temples, and a face that might have been carved out of Stone Mountain. His eyes swept the room and for just an instant they paused, staring at the dead man behind the desk. The muscles of his face stiffened, that was all. Then he was looking at Stuart. His eyes, Stuart saw, were icy blue.

The man reached into his pocket and took out a gun. "Well," he said, "we surprised you."

"I didn't kill him."

THE man held the gun as though it were a toy, as though he had forgotten he held it. But the muzzle pointed straight at Stuart.

"No?" the man said. "Who did?"

"I don't know. I found him. I came in just a moment before you and Ramsay."

"Ramsay," the man said. He stepped backward so that the butler lay between him and Stuart and he prodded the plump man with his toe. The butler made a moaning sound, nothing else.

Stuart said, "You are Wilson Massey, aren't you? I've heard Janis speak of you."

"That was nice of her. You are the horse trainer, Stuart, I imagine." His eyes surveyed the room again. Stuart thought he saw a slight wrinkle of his nose. "Where is Janis now?"

"I haven't seen her tonight."

Massey said nothing, and Stuart couldn't be sure whether or not he smelled the perfume. It had been a faint odor at best and was fading.

Massey was prodding the butler again, and Ramsay sat up, looking dazed. Massey said, "Didn't you tell me Mr. Stuart was here when you left an hour or so ago?"

"Y-yes, sir."

The cold eyes looked at Stuart, and Stuart said, "I left and came back." And, to Ramsay, "I thought you were going to a movie. You haven't had time for that."

"I—I found I had seen it. I went walking. I—" He couldn't keep from looking toward the corpse. His eyes, his whole head moved until he faced it, then jerked away again.

"So he got back before you expected," Massey said. "Go phone the police, Ramsay."

The butler got to his feet, wavering. He put one hand on the doorsill and gripping it moved forward into the hall and out of sight. Stuart and Wilson Massey and the corpse were left alone.

There had been a kind of numbness on Stuart but it was wearing off now. And as his mind began to work he understood more and more the spot in which he found himself.

He had been alone with Ward Hepburn when Ramsay left. He was alone with him when the butler returned, and Hepburn was dead. Ramsay might have known, might not, what his talk with Hepburn was about. But a lot of persons knew that Stuart had been going about with Janis lately, and probably knew that Hepburn didn't like it. And Stuart's fingerprints would be on the poker, unless the murderer had wiped off all prints.

From the hallway came the sound of Ramsay's voice, stammering over the phone to the police. It and the soft crackle of the fire were the only sound.

Then Wilson Massey said, "What's this?" and stepped close to the desk and leaned to look at Hepburn's clenched fist. That was when Stuart saw the button between Hepburn's fingers—the button which he, Stuart, had been flipping in the air as he sat here an hour ago. The button from his coat which he had left on the desk top.

And he knew then that whoever had murdered Ward Hepburn had put the button there after Hepburn was dead. Whoever had killed Hepburn had deliberately framed Stuart for the murder!

Massey looked from the button to Stuart's suit. "So you didn't do it!" he said.

"No."

There was very little of the button visible between Hepburn's fingers and it occurred to Stuart that most persons, standing where Massey had stood, would never have seen it. Nor would most persons be going around with guns in their pockets.

He tried to remember what little he had heard of this man with the square, hard face. He was a chemist, and had gone with Janis before she met Stuart. How serious that affair had been Stuart didn't know. Janis had talked of it very lightly. Janis had interested her uncle in putting up the money to start some kind of a drug packaging business with Massey leading it. When Janis lost interest in Massey her uncle had lost interest in the business. That much Stuart had heard from Janis, and that was all he knew.

RAMSEY came back into the room. He looked at the floor, the ceiling, anywhere except the corpse. And still his eyes kept going toward it as though drawn by a magnet.

"The police will be here soon," he said.

The front door opened. It was not a sound really, just a movement of the air. Yet all three of them were aware of it and they all turned. There was still no sound. Whoever had opened the door must be standing there, hand on the knob, waiting. Then they heard the door close and there was the light, sharp click of heels, and Stuart knew that Janis Crane was in the hallway.

A moment later she stood in the door to the study—a tall girl, as tall as Ray Stuart. And very beautiful. Slender and high-breasted, with a face that was proud and sharply cut, and a little spoiled and very confident, because since childhood she had had everything she ever wanted. Her hair was honey-blonde, shoulder length. Her eyes were gray-green with gold flecks in them.

She said, "Hello, everybody. I didn't know—" And then she screamed.

It was a good act, Stuart thought. He wondered if it fooled Ramsay and Wilson Massey. He was sure it would have fooled him if it had not been for the perfume. But he knew that she had been here only a few minutes before he returned and found Hepburn dead.

The police arrived. They swarmed over the place with a big man named Krug seeming to be in charge. He talked to Stuart and Ramsay and Wilson Massey and the girl as a group.

He talked to each of them separately. And little by little Stuart could feel the net tightening around him. He could tell it by the way the police began to look at him. He could tell it by the questions Krug asked.

"Mr. Hepburn had you here tonight to talk about your relations with his niece?"

"He didn't like you going around with her, huh?"

"What did he threaten to do if you didn't get out of town?"

The questions went on like that. Stuart tried to tell him about the two attempts on his own life, showed the cuts and bruises. "You could have got those fighting with Hepburn," Krug said.

"I didn't."

"Maybe."

Stuart tried to tell about the sounds he'd heard in the hallway, noises which Hepburn had said were made by a wind-blown door. "But I don't hear that door any more," Stuart said.

"If it was somebody in the hall, who was it?"

"I don't know. It must have been somebody that Hepburn knew was there, but didn't want to mention."

"Who could that be?"

"I don't know. I don't have any idea."

And so it went, and he could feel the suspicion tightening into certainty. Twice somebody had tried to murder him, he thought, and now this person had succeeded. For he was as good as dead. Framed for the murder of Ward Hepburn.

While Krug talked to Ramsay, the butler, Ray Stuart, had a chance to get the girl off to one side. They were in a big room where French windows opened onto a porch. Across the room from them stood a uniformed cop watching Stuart.

But the cop could not hear them if they spoke softly.

"What happened, Janis?" Stuart asked. He started to say, "Did you kill him?" And he couldn't say it. The words stuck in his throat. After a moment he asked, "Where were you earlier tonight?"

"I went to a cocktail party and had dinner with some people, at Arnaud's. Then I went up to your apartment. I—I waited, and then I just drove around for awhile. I went back to your place and had a drink or two. When you still didn't come, I came back here—and found you."

He wet his lips. "Was my car at my apartment when you went there?"

"I didn't notice it. I—I guess I was a little tight, after the cocktail party and dinner. I still am, I think. I can't seem to believe—" She reached out and put both hands on Ray Stuart's arms. She moved until her body was almost against his, her gold-flecked eyes only inches away. Her lips moved but made almost no sound. "Did you kill him, Ray?"

"No."

"I heard one of the policemen—the big man who asks all the questions—say that you did. He said they were just getting everything straight before they —" Her fingers dug into his arms. "You've got to get away, darling! You've got to!"

HER perfume was thick in his nostrils. But there were other persons who could use the same perfume, he thought. Even so, he couldn't tell the police about the perfume. They wouldn't believe him, and anyway he couldn't tell. But there wasn't much time for thought. They were going to arrest him! And with the police, and whoever had framed him, working to prove he was guilty—and they already had proof enough—

"You've got to get away!" the girl whispered. "Through the window, darling!"

She turned away from him. She went across the room toward the cop, her hips swaying as she moved. The cop stared at her, and Stuart could see the thoughts behind his eyes.

"You got a cigarette?" the girl asked.

The cop said, "Sure."

"A match?"

The cop struck it for her. She was standing between him and the window. Stuart opened the window and stepped out onto the porch. He went swiftly across it and there was an iron rail and he had his hands on this when he heard the cop shout. Then he was vaulting the rail, falling through darkness. His bad leg gave as he hit and he went down on all fours, stumbled up and was running.

Behind him the cop bellowed. There was the crack of a gun. A bullet whipped the branches of an oleander near his head. Then he was past the oleander, hidden by it. A moment later he was out of the gate and in his car.

CHAPTER IV

THAT HAD been about forty hours ago. Now he sat in the dark feedroom with the smell of hay and horses and old leather around him and he could remember the faint odor of perfume in the room where Ward Hepburn sat dead. And he could remember that Hepburn had said:

"The money is mine, Mr. Stuart, but Janis is my only relative."

But it didn't make sense, he told himself. If the murder of Hepburn was connected with the attempts on his own life—and it was stretching coincidence a long way to believe otherwise—what possible reason could Janis have for trying to kill him?

And it had been a man who drove the murder car. He was sure of that—at least, he was almost sure. And that green light over the man's face. The more he thought of it the more he kept coming back to Tom Bosard. But what possible connection would Bosard have with Ward Hepburn? As far as he knew, the two had never even met.

The door of the feedroom opened, forming a golden rectangle in which dust motes swirled crazily. The figure of an old Negro moved into the rectangle.

"Mr. Ray?"

"What is it, Cornbread?"

"I found out what you asked me to about Mr. Tom Bosard. He wasn't here all the time Wednesday night—the night you got in all this trouble."

"Where was he? Where did he go?"

"I don't know that. But old Sam, over to the Crescent barn, he said he come past Mr. Graves' barn twice early that night and Mr. Tom Bosard wasn't there neither time."

"Thanks, Cornbread. Thanks a lot. I'll have a talk with Tom tonight."

"And I got a note from Mr. Jim."

Stuart took the folded paper, held it in the dust-moted light to read. It was from Jim Tanner, the boy who rode for him, an orphan that Ray Stuart had picked up and practically adopted and was making into a topflight jockey. The note said:

> Have learned that Wilson Massey has been playing the horses, and trying to do it the sure way. And Bosard and Bill Graves are the guys who tout for him. What do you think of that?

"Mr. Ray?"

The note shook in Stuart's hand as he looked up. "What is it, Cornbread?"

"That Miss Janis Crane, she keep hanging around here. She say she got to see you."

"What did you tell her?"

"That I ain't got an idea where you at."

"Keep telling her that."

"Yessur."

AT FIFTEEN minutes after eight that night Ray Stuart opened the feedroom door and went out. The old Negro was beside him before he had gone a step. "You got to be careful, Mr. Ray. There's cops all over the place. That Mr. Krug and some fellow named Jones been around all day."

"I'll be careful. How's Redtop?"

"He's in shape, Mr. Ray. He'll give 'em a run for it."

"I'm going to give them a run for it, too," Ray Stuart said. "I'm not going to the electric chair without trying."

He moved away. Most of the persons

hereabouts were his friends. They could see him and say nothing. But somewhere there was the person who wanted to kill him, wanted him convicted of murder. And he didn't know who that person was.

"Ray!" He spun, surprise leaping like a pain in his chest. The girl had come out of the shadows. She was close to him, her hands on his arms. "Ray, I've got to see you. I've been trying all day. I knew you would be somewhere close around."

"What is it?"

"I've got to talk to you, Ray."

He could see the pale shadow of her hair, the oval of her face. And he could feel the heavy beating of his heart, as though the surprise was still on him.

"Come on," she said, pulling at his arm. "My car is just outside."

They moved through the shadows. There were the sounds of horses and voices. From tackroom doorways golden bits of light spilled into the night. The next barn was where Bill Graves kept his horses, where Tom Bosard worked. This was where Stuart had been going, but now—

Janis said, "Did you know Ward drew forty thousand dollars out of the bank Wednesday morning? And that the money has disappeared?"

"What did he draw it for?"

"I don't know. They don't know at the bank. But Ward was always—"

He didn't hear the rest of it. He had seen two men move into the light of a doorway at the end of the barn—the detective Krug and another detective he hadn't seen before. They stopped there, talking to someone. Perhaps the girl hadn't noticed, for she was still talking, her hand on Stuart's arm, pulling him on toward the detectives.

He stopped. He shook her arm off and started to go back the way he had come. And directly before him a doorway opened, pouring light outside. Bill Graves stood there in the light.

There was no time for thought. Stuart ducked through the door, pushing Graves ahead of him. And the girl, clinging to his arm, followed him inside. Stuart whirled, pulled the door shut behind him. Graves stared at him, eyes hard under his brows and ridged forehead.

"What's the idea, Ray?"

"Cops." He moved over, so that his back was against the wall. A saddle and blanket hanging there would hide him if the door opened. He said, "If you want to turn me in, Bill, all you've got to do is open that door and call."

The big man's frown changed into a slow smile. "Why should I turn you in? There's no reward for you, is there?"

Janis still held to Stuart's arm, standing close beside him against the wall. But she was looking at Graves, and the bald-headed man looked back at her, blankly for a moment before recognition showed in his eyes and he said:

"Hello, Miss Hepburn. I believe that's your name, isn't it?"

"Crane," the girl said. "I'm—Ward Hepburn's niece."

"I was sure that's where I saw you."

"You knew Hepburn?" Stuart asked.

"Not well. He asked me to come to his house once. It was, by the way, about you."

"What—?" His voice cut off. Outside there was the sound of voices, steps. Knuckles rapped on the tackroom door.

"One moment," Graves called. He moved with surprising quietness for a big man. One step took him to the table where there was a whiskey bottle and glasses. He moved the bottle, put it on the floor out of sight. Then he crossed back to the door and opened it. "Hello?" he said.

KRUG'S voice said, "I'm looking for Ray Stuart. Have you seen him around tonight?"

"Not for a couple of days."

"You know him?"

"Sure I know him."

Another voice said, "All these bums are covering up for him." The steps moved away. Graves shut the door and turned back toward Stuart and the girl.

Stuart let the long-held breath out of his lungs. "Thanks," he said.

"Don't mention it. They never did

me any favors." He went back and got the bottle from the floor. "If they'd seen this they'd have come in. Never saw a cop didn't go where he thought there was a free drink." He poured two drinks, then paused, looking at the girl. "Would you have one straight? There's nothing else here at the moment."

"I could use one," she said.

They drank and Stuart said, "You say Hepburn talked to you about me?"

"He wanted to know about your financial standing—if you were honest—that sort of thing. I told him you were as honest as a horse player could be."

"Why did he ask you?"

"He said he didn't know anybody around the track and Wilson Massey had told him I could furnish what information he needed."

"How is Wilson Massey doing with his gambling?"

Graves' fleshy face held an expression of amusement. "That jockey and swipe of yours have been doing a lot of detective work, haven't they? Well, I've seen Massey lose more than he won, but to hear him talk—" He shrugged. "Which doesn't mean anything, because all gamblers would rather talk about the times they win than the times they lose."

"Did Hepburn know Tom Bosard?" Stuart asked.

"Not that I know of."

"Where is Tom now?"

"He wanted the night off. He said he had a date with some very swanky broad. Some society dame. He didn't say who she was, but he was certainly impressed with himself."

"Any idea where I could find him?"

Bill Graves hesitated. His colorless mouth bent upward in a smile before he said, "He's got a one-room place on St. Peter's. But I don't think he would like it if you interrupted."

"I don't like it, being marked for the morgue," Stuart said.

The girl drove. They went down Esplanade where huge trees shaded the street and the street lights were like pools of white water. The night was warm and good and from hidden gardens came the odor of New Orleans in early spring, which is like no other odor in the world. The lights of a passing car washed over the girl's face, proud and beautiful.

"Janis," Stuart said.

"Yes?"

"Was Ward Hepburn dead when you came home the first time Wednesday night—before you came back to find me there?"

He saw her stiffen. Her head moved a little, so that she was looking toward him for an instant. Then she watched the street again. "Why do you think I had been there—before?"

"In his study there was the odor of the perfume you wear. Either you or some other woman, wearing the same perfume, had been there only a few minutes before I came."

"I had been there. I came in and found him—like that. And I was afraid. I—I told you I had been drinking. I couldn't think clearly. I had quarreled with him that very afternoon, about money, and all I could think of was that quarrel and that Ramsay had heard us. When someone knocked I—I just ran out the back. After awhile I came in the front door again and found you and Ramsay and Wilson there."

"Did Wilson Massey tell you why he was there?"

"He said it was to see me." She let her right hand rest for a moment on Stuart's knee. "He said he was still in love with me, and—"

"Is that why he brought a pistol?"

Her laughter was a little ragged. "Wilson always liked to carry a pistol. You've known persons like that. It gives them a feeling of importance."

"He sounds like a case for a psychiatrist."

The girl did not answer.

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CHAPTER V

THEY found Tom Bosard's address in the heart of the French Quarter. It was an ancient place. A solid wall fronted the sidewalk, and through the wall a narrow doorway opened into a courtyard.

"You wait here," Stuart told the girl.

"I'm going with you."

"No. There might—" But she had gone past him, through the narrow door. Her heels made soft noises on the old, molding brick.

It was a small courtyard. A fountain in the center no longer played water, but there was the smell of wisteria and the rustle of banana fronds from a dark corner. They went across the courtyard, found a door where a dim light burned. The mail boxes showed Tom Bosard as living in room 2E.

The stairway was old, dust-coated. They went up, along a hallway where only a single naked light burned. From somewhere there was the sound of a radio. When they found 2E they saw there was a light under the door. The radio was in this room, but through the heavy, ancient timbers of the house the sound came only faintly.

Stuart knocked. There was no answer, and he knocked again. "It's taking him awhile," Janis said, and giggled. It had a slightly hysterical sound. "I wonder who's the 'society broad' he's dating."

"We'll see." He turned the knob and the door swung open. Radio music, surprisingly loud, washed over them, beat at their ears. The radio was on a table, under a floor lamp, but so far as he could see there was no one here. He closed the door, went over and turned down the radio. The clanging, brassy noise of it made him jumpy.

"Not a very high class love nest," Janis said.

There was just the single room. The one floor lamp and the table with the radio. A day bed. A fireplace which burned gas logs instead of wood. A pair of French windows opening onto a tiny balcony.

The furniture was shabby. The pictures on the walls had been clipped from calendars and showed women with impossibly long legs and incredibly high, large bosoms. Such women had never existed, but it was a nice idea.

And then, on the floor beside the day bed, Stuart saw a pale gold shimmer, and bent, and picked up a fountain pen. On the gold clip of the pen was engraved the name, *Raymond Stuart*.

He looked at it, staring at it as if he could not tell what it was. The muscles felt tight in his throat and his hand began to shake slightly. Because it was his pen, all right. The last time he remembered seeing it, it had been on the dresser in his bedroom.

Then the girl screamed. It wasn't a loud sound—it was choked and awful. She was standing at the foot of the day bed, near the French windows, and slowly she moved backward until her shoulders were against the wall.

Stuart did not remember moving. But he was standing at the foot of the day bed, staring down at the body of Tom Bosard. Bosard lay on his back, curled between bed and wall. His forehead looked pulpy and his face was a mask of blood.

Then the door of the apartment opened and Detective Krug stood there with a gun in his hand and Jones behind him, looking over his shoulder.

"Well," Krug said, "I was beginning to wonder if we was ever going to catch up with you."

It was like the curtain on the second act of a play, Stuart thought with some back corner of his mind. The four of them, motionless, looking at one another, and the corpse staring up at him with blood-encrusted eyes. And in a moment the curtain would come down.

Only there wouldn't be any curtain. The police would come into the room, and he would be taken away, with handcuffs on his wrists. And he would sit in a cell for awhile, and there would be

that last brief walk, and he would die. He would never know why he had been framed, or who had done it.

He would never know, he thought—and it seemed curious even in that moment that he should think this—who the "society broad" had been who dated Tom Bosard.

The thought was still in his mind when Janis screamed. She raised her arm, one finger stabbing at Ray Stuart's face.

"He tried to kill me!" she screamed. "He killed this man, and tried to kill me." She ran, stumbling, and threw herself against Krug. "He tried to kill me!" she shrieked.

It seemed to Stuart that he stood there for hours, frozen, immobile, not able to believe what he heard. It was only seconds, actually. The girl was clinging to Krug, screaming. Over Krug's shoulder the face of the other detective looked startled and dazed. And and the girl clung to Krug so that his gun was pushed down toward the floor.

To Stuart it didn't seem that he really hurried. He pushed open the French windows, stepped through. Behind him the only sound was the girl's crying. He swung himself over the balcony rail, hung, dropped and caught the balcony floor with his fingers. For just a moment he hung there, then dropped.

Pain ran like fire through his bad leg. He had broken it, he thought. But then he was erect and moving. He was outside the courtyard door before Krug began to bellow from the balcony.

STUART heard the coded tapping on the feedroom door and he pushed a bale of hay, a feed sack aside, and came out from his hiding place as the door opened. The old Negro stepped quickly through the rectangle of golden-moted light, then closed the door behind him.

"It's time to take Redtop over, Mr. Ray."

"He's all ready?"

"Anything that beats him today will have to be a lot of horse."

"Okay. Tell Jim to use his own judgment. He's ridden him enough to know."

"Yessur. And, Mr. Ray—"

"What?"

"Don't you try to go out and watch this race. You know they done searched the barn twice today for you. This track is creeping with cops today."

"I'll be careful."

But after the old Negro was gone he sat in the dark feedroom and thought of how it would be outside—the bright sun and the wind moving the flags, and the green infield and the banked flowers, and the milling crowd. There would be ten thousand persons swarming around out there.

He told himself a man would be safe in a crowd that size—and didn't really believe it. But he wanted to see this race. He'd never had a horse that meant as much to him as Redtop, and this was Redtop's big chance. Stuart had bought him when he had a bowed tendon and was never expected to run again. Stuart wanted to see him run today.

Besides, he told himself, he would never learn the cause of what had happened if he just sat here in the dark. The motive for two murders and the attempts on his own life might be out there at the track today. There was the forty thousand dollars that had disappeared after Hepburn drew it from the bank. And Wilson Massey had been playing the races, with Graves and Tom Bosard to tout for him. It might all tie in with today's race.

He was never sure whether it was chiefly because he believed this, or because he wanted to watch Redtop run, but he pushed open the freedom door and went out into the sunlight. His leg hurt from the fall last night and his limp was bad.

The area around the barns was almost deserted because everyone who could had gone to watch the race. Stuart decided against going to the stands. There would be too many cops there. But there were a couple of mutuel windows on this side of the track where the men who worked around the barns could bet,

and he made his way to them.

He had never run a horse yet without betting on it, and he was going to bet on Redtop. He was not a heavy better, for he lived on his purses, not betting. But he wouldn't send a horse to the post without something on it.

There was no tote board on this side of the track, just a blackboard where a man, wearing earphones, constantly changed the figures. A crowd milled around and Stuart pushed his way into it.

Redtop was five to one, just as he had figured. Blue Bonnet three to two. Arrowhead six to one. Dangerous fifteen to one, and, as he watched, the figure dropped to twelve to one. Stuart frowned. Thirty to one would have been a more likely price, because Dangerous was out of his class in this field. Besides, the horse had been sick with a cold only a few days before.

A man standing beside Stuart said, "I wonder where all the money on Dangerous is coming from? I wouldn't take him at a hundred—unless I knew something."

"What was he on the morning line?"

"Opened at thirty-five, and dropped to ten. Somebody is putting up heavy dough."

"Who?"

"I don't know," the man said. "Nobody knows."

It was a mile and an eighth race and the horses broke from the starting gate on the far side of the track just as Stuart pushed his way to the fence. By the time he had his glasses focused they were going past the grandstand for the first time.

Arrowhead was on top, Time Bomb and Fisherman a half length back. Then there was Blue Bonnet, the favorite, with Redtop at his shoulders, and another half length back came Dangerous. They went into the first turn that way and came out of it with Fisherman already fading back.

WATCHING, the horses filling the circle of his glasses, storming toward him, Ray Stuart felt the old, choking up-surge of his heart that he always felt at a race. He could see Jim Tanner lying forward over Redtop's neck, holding him in, talking to him. And the big horse wanting his head, wanting to run, power in every movement of his beautiful body.

The horses thundered past him toward the far turn. Jim Tanner let Redtop out a notch. And at the same time Blue Bonnet began to move. He kept Redtop at his shoulder. They had already passed Fisherman. They swept past Time Bomb. They moved up on Arrowhead, and Arrowhead's jockey took to the whip.

So they went around the turn and came out into the stretch. Arrowhead faded. He went back. Blue Bonnet went out front with Redtop still at his shoulder.

Stuart had forgotten Dangerous. It was the roar of the crowd that reminded him. And at the same time the black head of the horse crept into the circle of his glasses, crept up to Redtop's flank. Kept moving. He saw Jim Tanner look back, saw him let Redtop all the way out and take to the whip. Blue Bonnet's jockey was already using his bat and the three horses were locked in a solid mass now, roaring down that last, long, uphill sixteenth.

And Dangerous moved out in front. He went with the ease of a truly great horse, a half length, a length, daylight between him and Redtop, and Blue Bonnet's nose at Redtop's neck now.

It wasn't anything about the look of the horse, the color or formation. It was the way he ran. Ray Stuart had owned Dangerous, worked with him, ridden him. And he knew that the horse on the far side of the track, sailing under the wire a length and a half to the good, was not Dangerous.

He never remembered climbing the fence. He was over it and running, the limp bad, crossing the infield, heading toward the grandstand. And it was all clear in his mind now. He knew why the attempts on his life had been made, and who had made them.

He ran past the tote board onto the

track. Dangerous was back in the winners' circle now. His jockey grinned from ear to ear. Bill Graves stood at the horse's head, while flashbulbs cracked. And beyond Graves, leaning against the fence, was Wilson Massey. Limping, Stuart headed toward the group.

And then he saw the cops. They were coming over the fence, Krug with Jones behind him. They closed in on Stuart before he could reach the group in front of the judges' stand.

"Wait!" Stuart said. "I can tell you—"

The handcuffs close around his wrist, fastening his wrist to Krug. Jones had him by the other arm.

"Now," Krug said, "what is it you can tell us, Bud?"

"I can tell you who those cuffs ought to be on," Stuart said. "I can tell you who killed Ward Hepburn and hired Bosard to kill me, and who killed Bosard. And I can tell you why."

"Yes. Who?"

They were standing in the center of the track, the whole crowd watching. The group in the winner's circle was watching, too, and Bill Graves left the horse and walked over to them.

"What's happened, Ray?" he asked.

"I got to watch the race," Stuart said. "And I tell you what I'll do. I'll bet my whole string of horses against yours that a careful check will show that the horse you ran today isn't Dangerous. It's a horse that I thought was dead, had died as a two-year-old. He was registered as War Talk, a grandson of Man O'War, and no wonder he could take down a ten-thousand-dollar stake."

"I expect you're right," Graves said. "Only I can't take your bet because you won't be around when the check is made. Because I'm going to get some satisfaction out of this. You see, I've been two years building up for this race and everything I ever hope to have was sunk on it. And they can't hang a man but once. So—" his pale mouth curved in a smile— "I'll have the pleasure of putting you out of the way."

His hand came out of his pocket. He didn't seem to hurry. The blackjack swung in the sunlight. The thought flashed in Stuart's mind: *It's what he killed Bosard with!* Graves smashed the blackjack at Stuart's head.

Stuart tried to jump. At the same instant Krug swung for Graves, forgetting he was handcuffed to Ray Stuart, and his swing jerked Stuart backward, held him for the down-whirling blackjack. He jerked his head to one side.

He thought the blow had ripped his ear off. Crazy lights spun before his eyes. But they cleared in a moment and he saw Graves stretched on the track, Jones standing over him holding another blackjack. And Krug was saying to Stuart:

"He just grazed you, Bud. You'll be all right in a few minutes."

RAY STUART and the girl were in the garden of the house on the Bayou St. John. The odor of azaleas and roses mingled on the wind from the lake. To the west a new moon made a silver crescent in a blue sky.

"It's one of the oldest tricks in the business," Stuart was explaining. "Graves had planned it for a couple of years, ever since he bought War Talk as a two-year-old. The horse had a split hoof and it was obvious that he couldn't be raced often, but he had good blood. He gave no promise of being a Kentucky Derby winner. He wasn't a Count Fleet, or anything like that. But he was a mighty good horse. I had worked with it—I worked for the millionaire who owned it. I tried to buy it but couldn't afford the price. And Bill Graves got it."

"And kept it without racing for two years?" she asked.

"Yes. It was a good horse, and might have made thirty or forty thousand a year for him, possibly a little more. But Bill Graves wanted to make a killing. He hid the horse away on a farm, said he had died, and waited his chance.

"He saw that chance when he saw Dangerous. I had Dangerous then and Graves bought him from me. Because Dangerous and this War Talk looked

like twins. With just a little touching up they could be made so nearly identical that it would take a detailed examination to tell them apart.

"And, you see, I was the only person who had ever owned, worked with, really knew both horses. I was the one person who would *know* that War Talk wasn't Dangerous, and more than that, I'd know which horse it really was."

"That's why he tried to—have you killed?"

"Yes. He admitted it all to the police, said he knew he had to have me out of the way before he made the swap. And to him the easiest way looked like an accident—killed by a hit-and-run driver. But your uncle didn't like the idea of murder."

"Ward had gone in with Graves on this scheme?"

"You said Ward always wanted to make money in some racket. Graves got him to put up money for some of the betting, but when Ward heard that I was to be killed he balked. He said he could get me out of town on another excuse. That's why he offered to pay me ten thousand dollars to leave. It wasn't to keep me away from you, but just to get me away."

"I wondered why he was so solicitous over my welfare. He never had been in the past."

"When I refused, Ward wanted to back down on the whole idea. But Graves was too far gone. He was in the hallway listening to my talk with Ward. Ward knew that, of course, but he didn't know that after I refused to leave, Graves went ahead and gave the signal to Tom Bosard to knock me off.

"They had planned it all, afraid that I would refuse. When he told Ward what he had done, Ward got frightened. He had drawn the forty thousand out of the bank to bet, but he refused to come across with it. He said he would go to the police. And so Graves killed him, took the money."

The girl shuddered. "And Tom Bosard?"

"The usual falling out between thieves. When they failed to get me out of the way Bosard got frightened. He was was for giving the whole thing up. But Graves already had too much money down. They fought, and Graves hit him with a blackjack—and kept hitting."

"Then his talk about Bosard's date—"

"Just a stall for us. He knew that if he gave me away to the police everybody around the track would be down on him. And he didn't want that. So he waited until we were gone, then slipped out and where nobody could see him he told the detectives that I had been in his tackroom, holding a gun on him, while they were there, told them I asked for Bosard's address and went there. They followed."

He turned to look at the girl then. Her face was pale in the gloom. "For just a moment that night," he said, "when you shouted that I had tried to kill you, I had some crazy ideas. And then I saw the way you were holding Krug's gun-arm. And I knew."

"You knew?" she said.

"I knew I had found the girl I was looking for, and had been for years."

PAYOFF IN VIOLENCE

A Novelet by HUGH PENTECOST Next Issue!

A Bargain IN CRIME

by SAM SLEUTH

SO GRATEFULLY received has been our slim guide to what is current and choice upon the 25c reprint shelves of the neighborhood stores that —well, we're having to do it all over again. Apparently the would-be purchaser does find himself in need of some sort of a guide when confronted by the hundreds of mystery and detective titles that stare him in the face.

So, for those who prefer to spend their nights sleeplessly, here are a few suggestions guaranteed to blanch the hair of the nearest and goriest corpse!

Reviews in Brief

THE DEADLY SUNSHADE, by Phoebe Atwood Taylor

The growing collection of addicts who follow the intricately bucolic adventures of Asey Mayo, the Cape Cod killer chiller, will find this among the very choicest of the series. Those who have not yet met the ace engineer of Porter Motors, Inc., will learn how fast the apparently slow-moving sleuth can swing into action after his perennial yachting cap is lifted from his moderately close-cropped crowning glory by an unseen sniper with an eye that is a little too good for comfort.

Asey, however, is not the corpse. That shapely body belongs—belonged, rather—to luscious Lucia Newell, apparently dead of sunstroke under a beach umbrella.

Doc Bunting called it sunstroke, but Asey and Doc Cummings knew better. And thereby hangs one of the better mysteries of this or any other season. Why anyone picked on a figure as shapely as Lucia's is a problem which demands all of the sage Cape Cod detective's sagacity and nerve.

●

THE ADVENTURES OF DR. THORNDYKE, by R. Austin Freeman

Some of the very finest stories of the so-called "British problem" school of mysteries. Never one to cheat the reader, the erudite Mr. Freeman and his famous master-detective, here bring in the reader as a witness in each crime presented, giving him all the needed evidence to solve the puzzles himself.

But somehow, even with this handicap, Mr. Freeman and Dr. Thorndyke seem to emerge the winner. Fine stuff for those who like to work out their own.

●

DESIGN IN EVIL, by Rufus King

Never set out to be a governess—at least for a backward child. This seems to be the moral of one of the finest stories by one of America's ablest veteran spinners of baffling stories. At any rate, what happens to Miriam Lake once she steps aboard the yacht *Donna Louise* for such a purpose shouldn't happen to a—well, to a governess. Before she could get a mistake in identity squared away she found herself riding the high seas with a killer.

A high-tension yarn that really hums!

●

THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE, by Ethel Lina White

The author of THE LADY VANISHES is in rare form in this one, which was also made into a top-flight motion picture. In a classic build-up of suspense, it tells the story of a strangler of comely young women through the viewpoint of the girl who is marked to be his next victim.

When Helen Capel took a job as maid in the country mansion of Professor Warren, she was in search of security. What she didn't bargain on was the strangler, whose most recent victim was found in a lonely house just five miles from the Warren menage.

A brilliant story of sheer horror!

Bennison whirled and leaped through the doorway

MURDER in MIND

JOHN D. MacDONALD

A few grains of gunpowder and a man's mental attitude both help a hick sleuth in solving the strange death of a woman killed by a rifle!

SHE was a plump blonde and she lay dead in the trail on her back. There were streaks of drying mud on the right sleeve of her pale yellow sweater. There was more mud on her freckled right arm. Death had flattened her body to the ground. Her tweed skirt was pushed up halfway between knee and hip. Her heels rested in the mud and her brown sandals toed in.

The black trees, stripped naked by autumn, stood high around her and the

chill wind off the lake hurried the dry brown leaves across the trail. A leaf had stuck to her hair over the right temple, where the hair was sticky with new blood.

I would have guessed that when she was alive, she was pretty and vivacious. Her lids were half closed, showing a semicircle of glazed bright blue.

Her husband, Ralph Bennison, or more accurately, her widower, had phoned Burt Stanleyson from the nearby village of Hoffwalker. Burt and I had climbed into the white County Police sedan and driven to Hoffwalker where Bennison had been waiting in his car.

He had stopped on the state road opposite that part of Lake Odega where numerous summer camps cluster along the lake shore.

We had followed him down the trail to the lake shore, seeing ahead of us the spot of color against the brown earth—her yellow sweater.

I leaned against a tree and Ralph Bennison sat on a rotting log, his face hidden in his hands. Burt Stanleyson stood beside the body of Mrs. Bennison, staring down at it, while he chewed a kitchen match.

I couldn't help noticing the difference between my friend Burt and Ralph Bennison. They were both big men. Burt wore a wrinkled gray suit, and still managed to look as if he belonged in the woods—perhaps it was the way he moved and the weather wrinkles that lined his brown face.

Bennison wore a red and black wool shirt with matching breeches and high shoes. But his face was white and he moved quickly and nervously. He had the city label on him, all the way from his big shiny fingernails to the bright new leather of his knife sheath.

Suddenly Bennison lifted his blotched face out of his hands and said in a tight voice, "Why are you standing around staring at her? Why aren't you across the lake trying to find out who fired the shot?"

Burt gave him a steady look and then knelt beside the dead woman. He fingered the hair around the wound, dislodging the crisp leaf. I could see the hole in her head, neat and round. Burt reached down and gently pulled the tweed skirt down around her knees. He stood up again and poked with his toe at the mud caked on the sides of her brown shoe. He sighed. The wind swirled a dancing funnel of leaves down the trail.

If it had happened in the summer, there would have been a crowd of summer folks standing around. But in November the camps are empty except for a few hunters, and they were still out in the woods after their deer.

BENNISON stood up and glared at Burt, then scuffed the hard ground with the toe of his spotless high shoes.

"Look here," he said, "Alice and I were walking down the trail with the lake at our right. She was ahead of me. The trail is muddy and uneven and I was watching my feet, like I told you. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her fall on her face. I jumped toward her, thinking that she had tripped. As I jumped, I heard a distant noise like a shot. I rolled her over and held her head in my arms. I saw she was dead, and realized that she had been killed by a stray shot. Then I came after you. Why aren't you after those people across the lake?"

Burt said patiently, "Mr. Bennison, there are two dozen hunters in there. It's four o'clock now. We couldn't round 'em up before dark, and most of them will be cutting back to the other road and driving out of the woods. They'd deny firing high toward the lake. We'd have to take their guns away from them and fire a sample slug from each one. Then we'd have to dig the slug out of your wife's brain and send the slugs down to a comparison microscope. It would be a colossal job. We'll just have to give it a lot of publicity and hope that some man's conscience will punish him."

"The bullet sort of came down on her, didn't it, Burt?" I asked.

"That's right, Joe. Thirty caliber. From better than a half mile, or it would have gone right through her."

He turned to Bennison and asked a blunt question.

"Did you folks come up here to do some hunting?"

Bennison sat down again on the log. He didn't seem angry any more. "Yeah. We rented the Tyler Camp for a week. I was going to do the hunting."

"Where's your gun?"

"Back in the camp."

"Have a gun for her?"

"I told you I was doing the hunting."

"I was just wondering. I notice she's got a little bruise under her right eye as if a gun stock had slapped against her face."

Burt pulled the sweater away from the rounded, white right shoulder. There was a purplish bruise there, too. He covered the shoulder again.

"She did some target practice with my gun," Bennison said. "She bruised easily."

I couldn't figure what Burt was driving at. He's never been one to ask useless questions. He's too lazy. It was obvious to me that the shot had come from a greater distance than a man can aim.

"What's your business?" Burt asked.

"Well . . . nothing at the moment. I used to be in the investment business."

"Married a gal with money, hey?"

"Look here, Stanleyson, I resent this questioning. What's that got to do with finding out which one of the hunters across the lake shot her?"

"Then she did have money?"

"Suppose she did? We both had money."

Burt sighed again and turned away from the body. He walked toward the lake shore and then looked back. A big tree grew close to the rocks along the shore. He squinted up at the tree. Then he ambled down the bank, squatted on a big rock and stared moodily at the water. Bennison shrugged helplessly and looked at me.

Burt came back up the bank and said, "Let's go back to the spot where you did this target practicing. Behind the Tyler Camp, wasn't it?"

Bennison stood up and we all walked back down the lake shore trail. Once Burt stopped and looked back at the dead woman and said, "Guess there's no need to move her just yet."

They had been firing at tin cans propped against a high bank behind the camp. Burt grunted and squatted and picked up a dozen or so of the gleaming brass cartridge cases. He examined them carelessly and stuffed them into his pocket.

Bennison seemed to have gotten tired of trying to figure out what the big man in the wrinkled gray suit was trying to do. He leaned against the cabin and stared out across the lake.

"You only brought this one gun of yours up here?" Burt asked.

"That's right," Bennison said in a flat tone.

"Mind if I look around the camp?"

"Go ahead."

WE WALKED in and Burt picked up the Remington rifle that stood in a corner of the front room. He glanced at it and put it back. Next he went under the camp to the work shop that old Tyler used to use before he died two years ago. Bennison seemed to be getting more irritable.

Burt glanced at the top of the work bench near the vise. He took the kitchen match out of his mouth, scratched it on the underside of the bench and then ran the flame back and forth, an eighth of an inch above the surface of the bench.

At last he grunted and turned to Bennison who was leaning against the wall, his arms folded.

"Well, Mister," Burt said slowly, "I guess we'd better drag the lake beyond that tree and get the other rifle."

I stood with my mouth open as Bennison whirled and leaped through the doorway. Burt was right behind him. It took me a couple of seconds to wake up. I ran after the two of them. Outside I saw that Bennison was running at full tilt up the trail toward the road. Burt had grabbed the Remington out of the corner. He leveled it, drew a deep breath, then squeezed the trigger.

The flat explosion of the shot echoed

through the clearing. Bennison fell and rolled through the dry leaves. When we reached him, he was clawing with his fingers at his shattered leg, and his face was the face of a madman. He was trying to curse Burt, but only guttural sounds issued from his throat. . . .

After the details had been cleaned up, the dead girl's relatives notified, and Bennison in the hospital, I sat in Burt's office, drinking cider with him and waiting for him to tell me in his own way.

"You see, Joe," he said, "I never would have tumbled to how Bennison did it, if he'd acted right. Maybe you didn't see it, but he was out of character. Any guy who loves his wife shows it in more than one way—even if she has died suddenly and violently. If he was on the level he would have yanked that skirt down himself. No fellow who loves his wife wants a couple of strangers seeing too much of her, even if she's dead. Also, he didn't object when we walked off and left her dead in the mud there. A normal guy would have wanted her moved and covered up."

"But was that enough?"

"No, but that started me noticing things. Things like her shoes being caked with mud and his being clean. Why would he clean his shoes? That started me thinking some more."

"What were you doing down by the water?"

"Looking for a little of that rainbow color that always shows up when you put a little oil in some water. Even one drop will do it—like when you toss a rifle in the lake. I found a little of it washed up to the rocks. Remember the wind was from the lake.

"You see, he went down the trail first, climbed the tree with the rifle, shot down into her head and threw the gun out into the lake. He wiped the mud off his shoes so he wouldn't leave mud on the tree when he climbed it. The trunk was fat enough to hide him from her."

"But why did he throw away the gun?"

[*Turn page*]

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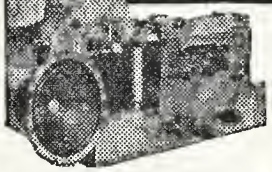

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"Because it could easily be proved that the slug in her skull had come from it. I figured he'd have to do that so I guessed there were two guns to start with. The oil convinced me that I was on the right track, and when I picked up those cartridge cases and found that on some of them, the firing pin hit flush on the rim, and on others the pin hit just a hair inside, I knew I was getting wärm."

"But Burt, it still doesn't make sense. If he did like you said, that slug would have gone through her head and dug itself six feet down into that mud."

"Joe, use your brains. How would you cut down muzzle velocity of a bullet so you'd lower the penetration?"

I thought it over as I sipped the cider. When it all came to me, I spilled a little cider on my pants.

He grinned as I said, "I get it. Bennison used the vise and took some of the charge out of the bullet shell. You figured it out and guessed that he might have spilled a little powder doing it. The match flame burned little grains of the powder that had dropped on the bench. He wedged the slug back in the case over the reduced charge and then shot her from the tree so it would look as if the slug had traveled in a high arch from across the lake!"

"You keep on getting so smart, Joe," Burt said, "and I'll be able to quit and turn over this thankless job to you. Bennison was sick of her and he wanted her dough. He brought her up here to kill her with the method all worked out. The biggest thing he forgot is that a fellow can't think of his wife who has just been killed as a dead body—unless he was used to thinking of her that way."

We sat for a couple of minutes and thought about Bennison. Then Burt sighed and said, "Just think. Middle of November and I ain't had a chance to knock off my deer yet this season."

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HUNTERS AND HUNTED

(Continued from page 10)

prolific fellows who can turn out a novelet in one sitting, Fred Brown really sweats his stories out the hard way. He works slowly and painstakingly and often has to whip himself over to his typewriter. But the results are well worth all the blood and sweat and tears —as our readers will agree when they read "The Dead Ringer," the lead novel in our next issue.

Murder Stalks a Carnival

Shortly after Ed Hunter and his Uncle Ambrose had run down the killer of Ed's father, Ed joined up with Hobart's Carnival to help Am with the baseball concession. They toured through Kentucky and Ohio and at every stop they always found enough young men anxious to try their skill at knocking over the wooden milk bottles with three baseballs.

Life for Ed and Uncle Am began to settle into a steady routine. Then on the night of August 15th while the carnival was staying in Evansville, Indiana, a brutal murder turned the happy carney folk into a taut, nervous group suspicious of each other and afraid to walk the grounds after dark.

A heavy rainstorm that night forced the carnival to close down early. Uncle Am went over to the big G-top for a private gambling session with some of the other carney men. Ed stayed in their sleeping tent to practice with his trombone.

Tiring of that, he went out for a walk in the rain. When he came back he changed into fresh clothes. In the midst of dressing a bolt of lightning hit the generator in the Diesel car and all the lights went out. Ed merely lit an emergency carbide lamp and lay down on his cot to read a detective story.

The storm gradually abated and everything seemed peaceful. Ed began to doze in bed. Then came the sound of

(Turn page)

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a shot drilling through the night's stillness. Ed struggled up out of a half-sleep and rushed outside. There he met his uncle and Hoagy Hoagland.

Together they followed the crowd of carney people running toward the sideshow tent. Flashlights shot their white beams of illumination over the muddy ground. And then, inside the sideshow tent, they came upon the white naked body of a boy, lying face down with a knife in his back.

The sight sickened Ed. He wandered outside. Anger throbbed within him as he wondered why anyone would kill a helpless young boy. It wasn't until minutes later that his Uncle Am told him the victim was a midget. But even then the killing didn't make sense because the midget was not a member of the carnival and not one of the carney employees recognized him.

The shot was explained by Rita Weiman, one of the new girls in the posing show. She had stumbled over the midget's body in going through the darkened sideshow tent and the gun she carried in her coat pocket had been accidentally discharged.

She was so upset by her discovery that Uncle Am insisted on Ed taking her for a drive to calm her nerves. That drive was an eventful one because Ed found himself falling hard for Rita, who told him in no uncertain terms that she was looking for a rich man. And yet, something in her eyes when she looked at him and something in the way she kissed him told him he had a chance.

The Wheels of Violence

The police investigation that followed turned up no clues. Rita came under no suspicion, despite the fact she had been carrying a gun, and no one else could throw any light on the midget's identity. Yet, the wheels of violence were inexorably turning, for the midget's murder was only the first of three killings that were to rock the entire carnival and turn it into a seething hotbed of terror, suspicion, accusation

and counter-accusation.

The following Sunday the carnival rolled into Fort Wayne. And the very next night the killer struck again. Ed and Uncle Am, Estelle Beck, Major Mote, another midget, and Lee Carey were all sitting around in the latter's trailer when Marge Hoagland, Hoagy's wife, rushed in to announce that Susie, Hoagy's pet chimpanzee, had vanished from her cage.

Susie had been ailing for weeks, yet homehow she had slipped the latch on her cage and gotten out. Everyone left the trailer to help in the search except little Major Mote, who looked completely transformed with terror.

It wasn't until Susie was found dead, floating in the water tank used by the high diver and it was learned that Mote had locked himself in the trailer and gotten dead drunk that Ed and Am

(Turn page)

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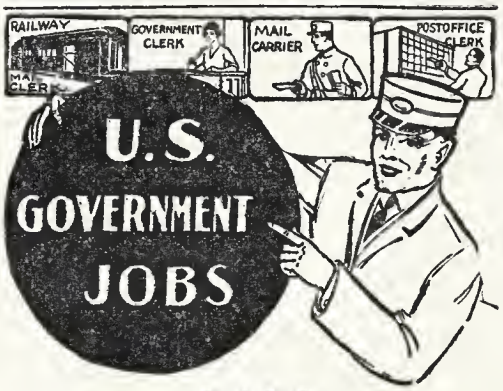

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Hunter understood the reason for Major Mote's fear.

Small People

The first victim had been a midget. The second was a small chimp, hardly larger than a midget. The murderer who was stalking the carnival seemed to have a liking for small people. And if any more proof were needed, it came with the murder, a few nights later, of little Jigaboo, a Negro lad who did a dance in the Jig tent.

Against the colorful carnival background of whirling ferris wheels, blazing lights, carousels, sideshow barkers, games of chance, "The Dead Ringer," by Fredric Brown moves with dramatic power, with compelling incident and growing suspense to a startling conclusion.

Even after the third killing the police found themselves as far away from a solution as they were at first. It is young Ed Hunter, with an assist from his Uncle Am, who lives up to his name and helps rout the murderer hidden in the carnival's midst and thereby exposes a vicious conspiracy which is the motivating cause of all the violence.

"The Dead Ringer" gives you real people at their work; it gives you a convincing behind-the-scenes view of carnival life. But more than that it is a powerful story, crisply and expertly written, crammed full with mystery and suspense—a story that is destined to bring well-deserved fame to an author who is on the way to the mystery Big Top!

Payoff in Violence

In addition to Fredric Brown's great new novel, we are proud to present another popular mystery author, Hugh Pentecost—a man well-known to readers of MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE—in a hard-hitting novelet entitled "Payoff in Violence."

Pentecost, who has established a tremendous following among detective

story fans, with his Inspector Luke Bradley mysteries, tells in "Payoff in Violence" the compelling tale of Mark Jadwin, a disbarred lawyer who emerges from a year in prison to find himself facing a grim murder frame-up arranged by the crooked city combine he has long been fighting.

Mark Jadwin's mistake lay in the fact that, despite his hard-headed coolness, he had a fatal soft spot inside him. And it led him to take a grave risk when he was appointed by the court to defend young Nils Waldeck, accused of petty thievery.

Waldeck, young and irresponsible brother of Hilda Stark, a nightclub dancer, had been employed as a hotel porter and had stolen a small sum of money from one of the guest rooms.

When Mark Jadwin first talked to Nils he advised the boy to plead guilty, serve his sentence and get a fresh start. It was then that Nil told him that it was his fourth offense—and a conviction would carry an automatic life sentence.

Somehow Mark believed in the boy, believed that he was the victim of circumstances—a boy with little education and no real family to cling to. And when Nils said that his sister Hilda and her husband, Joe, would swear that Nils had been with them all day and had not gone near the hotel, Mark took a chance and decided to include it in his testimony.

He knew he shouldn't touch it. It was a phony alibi that might boomerang and land him in jail. And that was just what happened—when Hilda double-crossed him and her own brother by revealing Jadwin's plan after Nils suddenly jumped bail and disappeared.

Jadwin went to prison. He also lost his license to practice law. And during the long and bitter twelve months he

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spent behind bars he tortured himself with the knowledge that Rex Brandon, a newspaper columnist; Paul Mason, assistant district attorney; and Police Commissioner Michael Garth were responsible for what had happened.

They had long feared Jadwin, representing the powerful Citizen's Good Government Committee, in its fight to oust the ruthless political machine of which they were a part. They had been looking for a way to smash Jadwin's power. And they had struck at him though Hilda—Mark was sure of that. They had forced her to sell out to them so that they could railroad him.

But things weren't over for Mark—not even after he emerged from jail, a free man once more. For suddenly, Hilda Stark was murdered in the night-club dressing room and Mark, because he had a strong reason for hating Hilda, found himself billed as the chief suspect. And leading the band against him was Rex Brandon in his poisonous newspaper column.

Hated by the city's political machine and distrusted by the Citizen's Good Government Committee, Mark stood

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alone. Only Sandra Rowell, a lovely young newspaper writer, believed in him. Even she wanted him to get away —to go somewhere else for a fresh start.

But Mark had a stubborn streak in him. He decided to stick, to fight Brandon and Mason and Garth and to clear himself of Hilda's murder. Then, without warning, Nils Waldeck returned to upset his plans and bring on new and dangerous complications.

"Payoff in Violence" is a tightly knit story, full of mounting drama and suspense. It is so real and vital that readers will find themselves living each minute of action, of terror and intrigue with Mark until the smashing payoff in violence.

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From Our Readers

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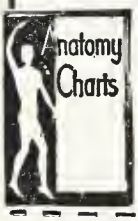

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report that the wind blows fair. The letters have been unanimous in their approval of the change and everyone seems to be delighted by the quality of the stories we are running as well as the great number of them.

Take Howard Chandler of Detroit, who wrote us a particularly nice missive:

> Dear Editor: I've been a reader of MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE since you first started with two short novels by Brett Halliday and Dorothy B. Hughes. To my mind you always gave excellent value for the 25c we readers had to pay. But now, as a bigger magazine, I honestly don't know how you can give us so much excellent fiction and so many fine features—not to mention 68 additional pages—all for the same 25c. All I can say is that I'm grateful and that I like MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE immensely. There is no better buy for the money today.

Spoken like a gentleman and a scholar, Howard. You have our sincere thanks for your very definite approval of our magazine. It will continue to be our policy to publish the best mysteries by the best authors and to give our readers just as many stories as we can possibly crowd into 196 pages.

Al Corwin out in Los Angeles also

Answer to
THE CLUE ON THE SHADE
(See page 118)

goes to bat for us in no uncertain terms. Just take a look:

Dear Editor: "Schooled to Kill" by Will Oursler was a clever and unusually well-written mystery. I've long been an admirer of the works of the Oursler family, having read all the Anthony Abbot mysteries by Fulton Oursler. However, I think young Oursler is serving notice on his Dad to move over and make room for another great writer. I also enjoyed William Irish's novelet "One Night in Barcelona." And all the short stories were remarkably good—right in line with the high quality of the other longer material. Keep it up and here's my check for a three-year subscription to your magazine. I don't intend to miss any issues.

Thank you, Al, both for the check and the hearty good wishes. And we want to thank all the rest of our readers who took the trouble to comment on the new MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE. Space does not allow us to print more letters, but please don't let that deter you from writing. All letters should be addressed to The Editor, MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE, Mystery Club, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. See you next issue.

THE EDITOR.

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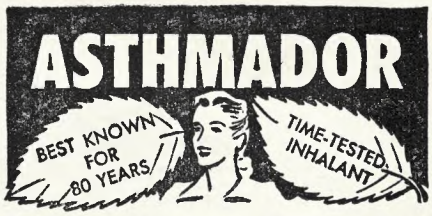

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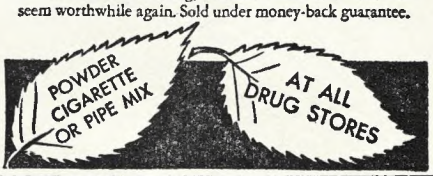

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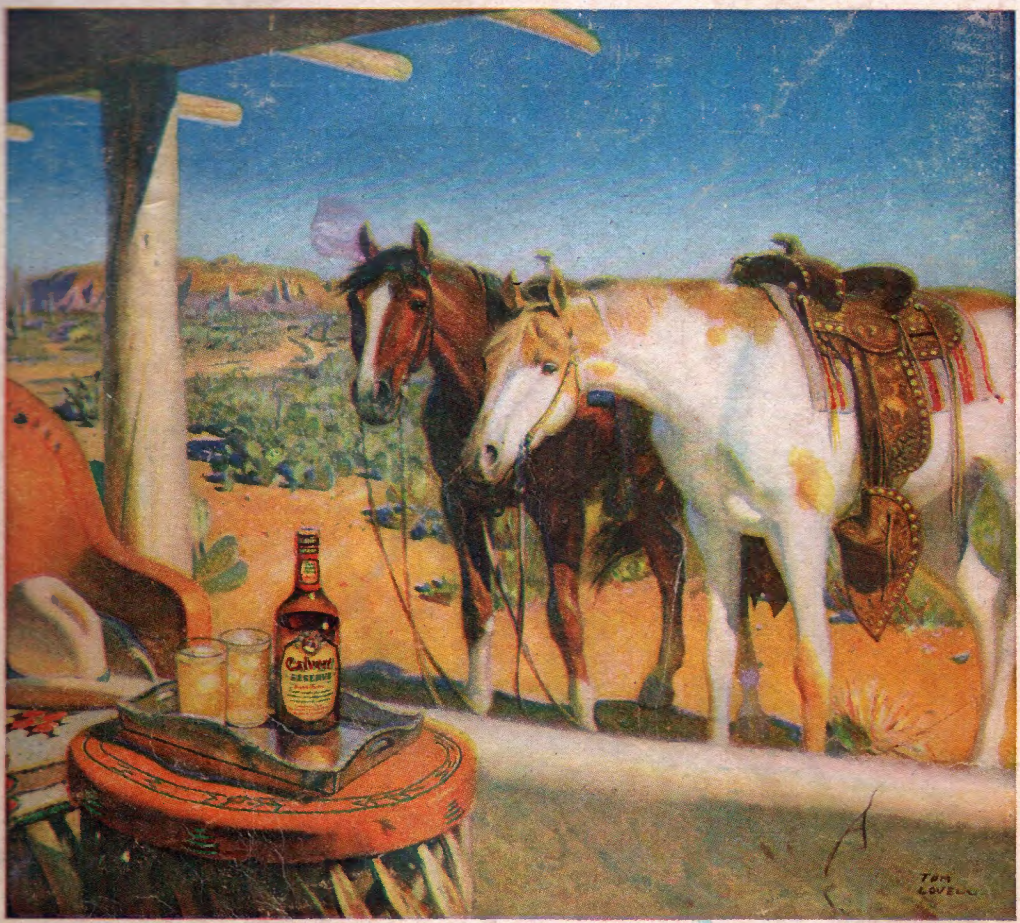

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